

**‘THAT HORROR AND DOOM VERY NEARLY RELATED
TO ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY’: DJUNA BARNES, T.S.
ELIOT, AND THE TRAGEDIES OF RELATION**

By

KATIE JEMMA LOWE

**A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (MODE B)**

Department of English
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham
September 2010

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relation between the works of Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot, largely through the lens of his preface to *Nightwood*, in which he claims that Barnes' novel possessed 'the great achievement of a style, the beauty of phrasing, the brilliance of wit and characterisation, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy' [Barnes, 1985: 7]. For both authors, the tragic was a means of expressing two polarities of human experience – the primal, and the divine. Both, however, rely upon a pre-linguistic sensation that underpins both constructed and instinctual mechanisms of society. The relations of the family, and of gendered identities, therefore, are revealed as central paradigms for thinking about Barnes' and Eliot's works. These schemes of relation may also be observed on a wider scale for both authors in their approaches to their literary and historical genealogy. The presence of the past in both authors' works is undeniable, creating an intertextual web of connections which can be viewed as constraining, or liberating; as an oppressive past that may never be overcome, or as a springboard from which to progress.

DEDICATION

To the constant love and support of my amazing family - my most profound source of inspiration and hope.

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**‘That horror and doom very nearly related to Elizabethan tragedy’ – Djuna Barnes,
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INTRODUCTION

Djuna Barnes (1892-1982), as a female modernist writer and ‘the most famous unknown in the world,’ [Herring, 1995] is best remembered for her 1936 novel, *Nightwood*, though her oeuvre also includes a variety of poetry, journalism, and drama. T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) warrants less in the way of introduction; as the archetypal image of the male modernist, his work and presence in the editing of Barnes’ novel and final play, *The Antiphon*, has often been assumed to have borne an inescapable influence upon Barnes’ work. The dynamics of their literary and personal relationship have been largely depicted as one-sided, bound in the strictures of patriarchal authority, yet a closer investigation into their work reveals a symbiosis of influence and referentiality which offers a counterpoint to conventional patriarchal and feminist paradigms of male domination and female oppression. I suggest that this is due to a shared interest in tragedy and abjection, which allowed them to embrace their literary affinities in spite of the gender divide, and explore the complexities of relation both in literature and life.

Both authors were fiercely protective of their biographical materials, desiring a critical focus on their works, rather than their personal lives. As Barnes wrote to Natalie Barney in 1968, ‘Tom Eliot himself, that most written about gentleman, gave orders, “no biography”. If someone wants to assess my writings, well & good; my personal life is another matter’ [Taylor, 2010: 7]. This concern with privacy, however, is ambiguous and

arguably superficial for both Barnes and Eliot. In his memoirs of his time with Barnes, Hank O'Neal writes that 'there were certain things she didn't want anyone to know, drafts she didn't want anyone to see, notebooks of ideas that were hers alone, but in the end she made certain all this material would fall into public hands' [O'Neal, 1990: 174]. Similarly, Eliot's wife Valerie is currently engaged in the painstaking process of sorting through Eliot's letters for publication; and biographers including Peter Ackroyd and Lyndall Gordon have published extensive, detailed critical works, seemingly with the permission of the Eliot estate. Their works are manifest with both coded and overt references to the minutiae of their lives, from their doomed love affairs to their complex familial relations, and as such an approach to Barnes and Eliot's literary and personal relationships devoid of biographical aspect would be unhelpful and irrelevant. However, recent criticism seems to have favoured an almost entirely biographical approach which reduces each to essentialist biological notions of gender, with an apparent blindness to the acts, both in language and life, of the authors themselves. There is an inextricability manifest between Barnes and Eliot's personal lives and their works that requires an even focus on the biographical and the critical, which I hope to achieve herein.

I approach Barnes' and Eliot's respective oeuvres largely through the lens of his most revered and maligned attribution of 'that quality of horror and doom very nearly related to Elizabethan tragedy' to Barnes' 1936 novel, *Nightwood*,¹ which was edited by Eliot for Faber & Faber following numerous rejections by American publishers. While many critical references to Eliot's introduction claim that it was an attempt on his part to squeeze Barnes into his own 'ideal' of Modernism [Miller, 2000; Marcus, 1989], I believe that this overlooks the fact that for Eliot, Elizabethan drama was at the centre of a matrix

¹ Eliot's preface appears in the 1937 edition of the novel.

of ideas about art and morality, whose precepts could be found from the high Modernist aesthetic to the early twentieth century British music-hall. This drama exerted a powerful and pervasive influence on both Eliot and Barnes, and their works, consciously or otherwise, strove to achieve the same ends in their similarities with the form. There are further implications to Eliot's statement: the 'horror' (a word which appears frequently throughout his criticism and works) I suggest is an early manifestation of Julia Kristeva's theories of abjection, and as such, Kristeva's theories inform much of this thesis. The recourse to tragedy and tradition, I suggest, echoes Sir James Frazer's 1922 anthropological study, *The Golden Bough*. His extensive work on fertility myths, and images of ritual and sacrifice seem to provide an influence throughout both Barnes' and Eliot's works, combined with an interest in the Freudian 'uncanny,' and a pre-empting of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque which, I suggest, these authors used to evoke a disquieting sense of the past within the present. As Eliot wrote in 'The Duchess of Malfi,' 'in a world without meaning there can still be horror, but not tragedy' [Schuchard, 1999: 130], and his differentiation between the two shows both the prestige awarded to Barnes' writing in its ability to distil the tragic from the horror of the early twentieth century.

Eliot had been vocal in his high regard for Elizabethan drama prior to his work with Barnes; yet in a letter to Geoffrey Faber after reading the novel, Eliot wrote that 'as for her style, it has what is for me the authentic evidence of power, in that I find myself having to struggle, directly after reading, not to ape it myself; and very few writers exercise that pull' [Herring, 1995: 230]. The notion of 'power' employed by Eliot in his description of Barnes' style invites a discussion of the structures of influence at work in their relationship, in terms of both the literary and the social. The Foucauldian implications of this 'power' call for an investigation into current assumptions regarding

the Barnes/Eliot dynamic, which rest upon long accepted notions of the unequal power relations within their relationship. I would suggest instead that there is a critically neglected pattern of influence not merely of Eliot on Barnes, but of Barnes on Eliot.

In light of recent critical discussions of the Barnes/Eliot dynamic, this thesis will explore not only the elements of and move towards drama in their work, but will do so with a careful study of the machinations of gender in their textual and interpersonal interactions. A closer study of these authors' personal lives shows a destructive similarity in their sexual relationships – Barnes with Thelma Wood, Eliot with Vivien Haigh-Wood – and the exploration of their mutual ambivalence, yet attraction towards, homosexuality, will perhaps illuminate the appeal that lay for each in the Elizabethan stage. I will then demonstrate how the notion of heredity and influence so pervasive in Eliot's critical works manifests itself for both Barnes and Eliot in a critical stance towards family roles, in particular that of the matriarch in their late plays. When Eliot's compulsion towards order and tradition, heredity and genealogy is considered alongside Barnes' supposed position on the outside of these (by virtue of being female, and outside of the canon), the ostensibly 'obvious' assumptions of misogyny and Freudian complexes on Eliot's part are tested by the similarities in Barnes' approach. The reductive categories of gender at work in many critical discussions of Barnes and Eliot are inelastic in their reliance upon essentialist notions of 'masculine' and 'feminine,' and I would like to argue that Barnes and Eliot saw and experienced first-hand the disintegration of such boundaries, both on a personal level, and on a wider scale with the advent and decay of the Modernist era. Like Kristeva, they hoped to 'take us beyond categories that have traditionally been used to limit us, all of us, both women and men...to conceive of a notion of difference that does not operate according to a dualistic

logic of opposition,' [Oliver, 1993: 7] and as such, this thesis aims to explore the theoretical shifts and transgressive structures through which Barnes and Eliot weaved their works.

**Chapter 1. 'STAGE-TRICKS HAVE BEEN TAKEN FROM LIFE, SO FINDING YOURSELF
EMPLOYING THEM YOU WERE CONFUSED WITH A SENSE OF SHAME' –
ELIZABETHAN DRAMA AND THE PREFACE TO *NIGHTWOOD***

Eliot's description of *Nightwood* as possessing 'the great achievement of a style, the beauty of phrasing, the brilliance of wit and characterisation, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy' [Barnes, 1985: 7] incorporates fragments of the genre as described in many of his earlier essays. Indeed, a full exploration of Eliot's intended meaning in his attribution of these qualities to Barnes' novel shows less the 'imposition' of his own literary and theoretical paradigms, and more a great admiration for Barnes' poetic achievement. It is important to remember that for Eliot, the achievement of Renaissance dramatists was the pinnacle of literary excellence. He himself had attempted, following the success of *The Waste Land* in 1922, to create a play following Elizabethan ideals, for as Ronald Schuchard writes, 'Eliot had begun to infuse all sorts of popular arts into *Sweeney Agonistes*, intending to make it a composite of several cultural levels of entertainment, like Elizabethan drama' [Schuchard, 1999: 114]. Eliot's compliment was therefore unlikely to have been bestowed on Barnes' novel without his careful consideration. Miriam Fuchs and Philip Herring have described Eliot's introduction as 'ambiguous' [Fuchs, 1993: 289] and 'mere posturing' [Herring, 1995: 233], referring in particular to his apparently off-putting claim that her prose 'demands something of the reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to give,' [Barnes, 1985: 2]. Conversely, Alan Singer has claimed that 'evident in Eliot's reluctance to apply generic conventions in evaluating Barnes' prose is a radically subversive insight: language itself implies a conceptual freedom that the genre may acknowledge only at the risk of disorder' [Singer, 1984: 68]. One might

suggest that Eliot was also implicitly referring to his claim in the 1919 essay 'Ben Jonson,' that 'not many people are capable of discovering for themselves the beauty which is only found after labour' [Eliot, 1963: 68]. Similarly, his ambivalent attitude towards the term 'novel' may be less a criticism of Barnes' chosen form, and more an admission that the adherence to any given form or style is fluid and impossible to define. As he writes of Jonson, 'the classification of tragedy and comedy...is not adequate to a drama of such variations as the Elizabethans' [Eliot, 1963: 69].

The essay on Jonson is illuminating in its description of the playwright's work, as there are many points of comparison with Barnes' novel which Eliot may have had in mind when writing his introduction. Barnes' 'astonishing language' [Barnes, 1985: 2] and dense plot may be likened to Jonson's work, whose 'consistent maintenance of [rhetoric] conveys in the end an effect not of verbosity, but of bold, even shocking and terrifying directness. We have difficulty in saying exactly what produces this simple and single effect...it is not so much skill in plot as skill in doing without a plot' [Eliot, 1963: 76].

With reference to Jonson's characters, Eliot refers to the way in which the characters 'fit in with each other...not [as] personifications of passions; separately, they have not even that reality, they are constituents' [Eliot, 1963: 74], reflecting the characters in *Nightwood* and the 'whole pattern that they form, rather than any individual constituent, that is the focus of interest' [Barnes, 1985: 5]. He sees Jonson's characters as 'simplified,' in a 'reduction of detail, in the seizing of aspects relevant to the relief of an emotional response which remains the same for that character, in making the character conform to a particular setting. The stripping is essential to the art, to which is also essential a flat distortion in the drawing; it is an art of...great caricature, which is beautiful; and a great humour, which is serious' [Eliot, 1963: 80]. The often sparse characterisation employed

by Barnes reflects such a description entirely; and Eliot's claim that 'sometimes in a phrase the characters spring to life so suddenly that one is taken aback, as if one had touched a wax-work figure and discovered that it was a live policeman,' [Barnes, 1985: 4] reflects the 'deliberate' two-dimensionality of Jonson's characters that he defends [Eliot, 1963: 81]. The characters of both Jonson and Barnes are real in their unreality, eluding the critical impulse to definition, as in the case of Robin Vote, who 'we find...quite real without quite understanding the means by which the author has made her so,' [Barnes, 1985: 5] and 'beneath the theory, beneath the observation, beneath the deliberate drawing and theatrical and dramatic elaboration,' in Jonson, where 'there is discovered a kind of power...which comes from below the intellect, and for which no theory of humours will account' [Eliot, 1963: 80]. Thus the apparent ambivalence of Eliot's introduction, in this context, may perhaps be more fruitfully regarded as an acknowledgement on Eliot's part of the depth of Barnes' prose, and its ability to remain indefinable. He would return to the elusiveness of meaning in his late poem, 'The Dry Salvages' suggesting that meaning was both universal and indescribable:

'I have said before
 That the past experience revived in the meaning
 Is not the experience of one life only
 But of many generations – not forgetting
 Something that is probably quite ineffable.'
[Eliot, 2004: 187]

Perhaps the most interesting term Eliot employs in his assessment of Jonson's plays lies in its apparent quality as 'poetry of the surface' which 'cannot be understood without study; for to deal with the surface of life, as Jonson dealt with it, is to deal so deliberately that we too must be deliberate in order to understand' [Eliot, 1963: 68]. While for Eliot, Jonson's 'poetry of the surface' is the supreme quality of his work, Joan Retallack

conversely suggests of Barnes that 'Barnes is condemned to surfaces, and that's where her brilliance lies – in description' [Broe, 1991: 47]. Retallack's backhanded compliment suggests that the surface forms the whole of Barnes' skill, yet Julie Veronica Taylor has instead suggested that 'while Barnes' work would seem to challenge the idea that emotion moves 'from surface to depth,' it also suggests that feeling at the surface is what – in a highly relational manner – might define *and* blur the boundaries of the subject' [Taylor, 2010: 26]. When we consider *Nightwood* in relation to the austere simplicity of Barnes' short plays, with their paradoxical intensity and outlined shadows of intimacy, we may see an avant-garde stylization of the allegorical as popularised in medieval and Renaissance drama. As Alex Goody suggests, Barnes' 'avant-garde work is set apart by her stylization and artifice...and the special emphasis on 'beauty', 'cowardice', 'sensitivity' and 'freedom'; as intensive, affective states' [Goody, 2007: 36]. Barnes' lost lovers, in Nora and Felix; her mythical beauty, in Robin; the hopeless romantic in *Kurzy of the Sea* and 'avenging' sons in *Three From The Earth*, possess an archetypal significance common to the allegorical and 'stock' characters of the Elizabethan stage. Cheryl Plumb has thus described Barnes' characters as 'types; she combines abstract suggestion with psychological intensity' [Plumb, 1986: 13]. They are modernized in their individual and often absurd dilemmas, claiming the emotional profundity of the universal feelings of love, hate, revenge, and so on, in pointedly perverse situations. This leaves the reader, as with Eliot, precariously placed between Barnes' self-conscious and wilful irony, and the very depths of human feeling that her characters present refracted upon their surfaces, perhaps in some way explaining Eliot's comment that 'the miseries that people suffer through their particular abnormalities of temperament are visible on the surface: the deeper design is that of the human misery and bondage which is

universal' [Barnes, 1985: 5]. While this has been claimed as an example of Eliot's 'universalising' impulse, it does in fact reflect the mad doctor O'Connor's claim that 'no man needs curing of his individual sickness, his universal malady is what he should look to' [Barnes, 1985: 52].

Robert N. Watson has suggested that this may be the key to the endurance of tragedy, as it 'typically reminds its spectators of something they share and commonly struggle to forget: the progress from aspiration to death, from moments that promise glory (even if they are only the infantile fantasies of omnipotence) to eventual surrender (even if it is only the banal fact of mortality). Tragedy also attunes itself to the sharings of primal guilt, in the practice of ritual sacrifice it essentially re-enacts, as well as in durable parables like that of Oedipus' [Watson, 2003: 294]. Watson's use of the Oedipal myth to exemplify such a 'durable parable' is particularly pertinent when considered alongside the works of Barnes and Eliot, working in the wake of Freud's enormously influential psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, in the very form of Renaissance drama Eliot locates an appeal to the depths of human psychology. He suggests that verse drama is 'in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama,' because, instead of clothing nature in poetry, it should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance.' He continues, in a construction which bears the echoes of *Nightwood's* closing scene, 'it must reveal, underneath the vacillating or infirm character, the indomitable unconscious will; and underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal, the victim of circumstance and the doomed or sanctified being' [Bethell, 1944: 9]. Not only *Nightwood* is echoed here, however; for in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he writes 'it is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as

quickly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey' [Freud, 1990: 313].

The repression of the 'indomitable unconscious will' and its tendency to be revealed when appearance shifts, and primitive ontology seeps through the gaps, reflects Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, elucidated in her 1980 essay, *Powers of Horror*. She writes 'the abject might then appear as the most *fragile* (from a synchronic point of view), the most *archaic* (from a diachronic one) sublimation of an "object" still inseparable from drives. The abject is that pseudo-object that is made up *before* but appears only within the gaps of secondary repression. *The abject would thus be the "object" of primal repression*' [Kristeva, 1980: 12]. Eliot's juxtaposition of 'doomed or sanctified' is suggestive both of the difference between these two states, and the delicate equilibrium that maintains this difference. Thus what Eliot found in Barnes' novel was the interweaving of the 'sacred and profane,' [Barnes, 1985: 204] the spiritual and primitive depicted as Eliot found them, only separated by mere degrees. This is the fundamental opposition worked apart by both Barnes and Eliot in their works – as the Heraclitean epigraph to *Four Quartets* claims, 'the way up and the way down are one and the same' [Blissett, 2001: 31]. This is perhaps pre-empted by repeated declarations by O'Connor in *Nightwood*, who claims: 'we go up – but we come down' [Barnes, 1985: 63]. And later: 'we do not "climb" to heights – we are eaten away to them' [Barnes, 1985: 169]. Thus there is no such thing, for Barnes and Eliot, as a simple binary, and the dichotomies replete throughout criticism of these authors serve only to conceal the similarities in Barnes' and Eliot's lives and works.

Eliot's interest in the capacity of rhythm to evoke a primal response, at a deeper level than prose alone, is evident in his claim that 'it is possible that what distinguishes poetic drama is a kind of doubleness in the action, as if it took place on two planes at once. In this it is different from allegory, in which the abstraction is something conceived, not something differently felt, from symbolism...in which the tangible world is deliberately diminished – both symbolism and allegory being operations of the conscious planning mind. In poetic drama a certain apparent irrelevance may be the symptom of this doubleness; or the drama has an under-pattern, less manifest than the theatrical one' [Eliot, 1968: 162]. This pre-empts Calvin Bedient's suggestion that for Kristeva, 'poetry sacrifices theology, or the thetic, to traces of nonsymbolized drive. Poetry, that is, exploits and augments the "semiotic chora" with which language is already charged, the prelinguistic elements at its origins (rhythm, breath impulsion, intonation)' [Bedient, 1990: 809]. While Eliot is the last person we might claim to have sacrificed his theological concerns, in *Sweeney Agonistes: Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama*, William V. Spanos has observed the merging of form and style, describing it as 'comic-tragic anti-art,' [Spanos, 1970: 17] and its subversive characters and use of jazz drum rhythms for emphasis are an attempt to create a rhythmical experimentation that would appeal to the primal nature latent in his audience. His interest in the deep qualities of rhythm, the power in the beating of the drum, may be related to his early interests in anthropology, qua Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1922) and the Eastern religious practices he studied in his time at Harvard. One might argue that Barnes achieved this in *Nightwood*, with her long, flowing phrases so unique and exact in form that critics struggle not to quote them in their entirety. Eliot describes this as the appeal to the 'auditory imagination,' defined as 'the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far

below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back' [Eliot, 1986: 118]. The Elizabethan dramatists represented the evolution to perfection of this, with their 'process of splitting up the primitive rhetoric, developing out of it subtler poetry and subtler tones of conversation, eventually mingling, as no other school of dramatists has done, the oratorical, the conversational, the elaborate and the simple, the direct and the indirect' [Eliot, 1968: 42].

The emphasis placed by Eliot upon tragedy as the exposure of the primitive and bestial in man supports his simultaneous focus upon that higher state outside of human consciousness explored in *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. His critical and poetic oeuvre is replete with allusions to the subconscious and indescribable, and 'the still point' at which may be found 'both a new world/And the old made explicit, understood/In the completion of its partial ecstasy,/The resolution of its partial horror' [Eliot, 2004: 173]. In this, he echoes the early philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, who claimed that 'there was a primordial time for man when he lay on the heart of nature and, in this state of nature, at the same time attained the ideal of humanity in paradisaal goodness and artistry... Through his operatic imitation of Greek tragedy, the educated man of the Renaissance let himself be led back to such a harmony of nature and the ideal, to an idyllic reality' [Nietzsche, 1999: 92]. Linda Leavell has suggested that the key similarity between Nietzschean and Eliotic ideals of drama is the 'idea of the theatre experience itself as ritual' [Leavell, 1985: 116] suggesting simultaneously an awareness of performativity, and a model of the play in performance imbued with the echoes of its predecessors; a fertile tradition in eternal return. Barnes, too, acknowledged the

Nietzschean influence in her early works. Her 1919 play *Three From The Earth* depicts a woman confronted by the three sons of her married lover. They say:

HENRY: Your life is drawing to a close.

JAMES: And from time to time you place your finger on a line of Nietzsche or Schopenhauer, wondering: "How did he say it all in two lines?" Eh?

[Barnes, 1995: 78]

This of course demonstrates that Barnes was at least familiar with Nietzschean philosophy, and suggests that Kate, who '*has an air of one used to adulation and the pleasure of exerting her will*' [Barnes, 1995: 70] is conscious of her actions as just that, observing the results of her interactions with those around her. In response to the news of her lover's suicide, she asks 'How did he look?' to which John responds: 'You can't satisfy your aesthetic sense that way – he looked – well, ugly, played out; yes, played out' [Barnes, 2005: 78]. Kate's concern with the aesthetic, superficial result of her lover's suicide, rather than the psychology behind it, perhaps reflects a passage of Nietzsche that particularly struck a chord with her; for as Daniela Caselli has observed, Barnes marked her own copy of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, marking the lines 'occasionally folly itself is the mask of an unfortunate *over-assured* knowledge. – From which it follows that it is the part of a more refined humanity to have reverence "for the mask", and not to make use of psychology and curiosity in the wrong place' [Caselli, 2009: 184]. Thus the play subverts any psychological reading whilst seeming to invite one, as Kate combines the Nietzschean ideas of pessimism and the will with the aesthetic and performative, in a tragedy in miniature not unlike the doll's house of *The Antiphon*. The play's simplicity heightens its intensity, and the pessimistic focus here and in Barnes' other writings of the time led to a defensive response to an accusation of morbidity by Guido Bruno, who claims that she responded 'morbid? You make me laugh.

This life I write and draw and portray is life as it is, and therefore you call it morbid. Look at my life. Look at the life around me. Where is this beauty that I am supposed to miss? The nice episodes that others depict? Is not everything morbid? I mean the life of people stripped of their masks. Where are the relieving features?' [Barry, 1987: 386]. Morbidity, however, was not necessarily a wholly negative attribute; for Eliot, in an essay on Blake, claims that 'nothing that can be called morbid or abnormal or perverse, none of the things which exemplify the sickness of an epoch or a fashion, has this quality; only those things which, by some extraordinary labour of simplification, exhibit the essential sickness or strength of the human soul' [Eliot, 1969: 317].

Eliot's statement perhaps belies the early influence of Arthur Symonds on his critical consciousness – in particular his essay *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, later renamed *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. It bears the imprint of Symonds' descriptions of a 'morbid intensity in seeing and seizing things,' the 'spiritual and moral perversity' and 'the exquisitely abnormal' [Beckson, 1982: 138]. Barnes' work, too, has often been aligned with the decadent – not least because of the Beardsleyesque drawings that accompanied her early journalism – and the celebration of the perverse punctuates her work. In a 1917 interview with the boxer Frank Harris, she writes 'I knew that he was referring to those of us who have been born with a little reverence for the things that are beautiful, and a little love for the things that are terrible,' [Barry, 1987: 210]. Similarly, in *Elizabethan Dramatists* Eliot writes that 'to those who have experienced the full horror of life, tragedy is still inadequate... In the end, horror and laughter may be one – only when horror and laughter have become as horrible and laughable as they can be...then only do you perceive the aim of the comic and the tragic dramatists is the same' [Eliot, 1934: 287]. Ronald Schuchard has suggested of Eliot's

aesthetic criteria, in particular with regard to whose books he would help to reach publication, that he was 'quick to identify and sympathise with fellow writers whose attempts to represent significant visions of horror fell on an uncomprehending public,' [Schuchard, 1999: 122] referring not to Barnes in this instance, but to Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917), and thus suggesting that his support of the woman writing in Barnes was not an isolated exception to a misogynistic rule. Instead, Eliot believed that 'the contemplation of the horrid or sordid or disgusting, by an artist, is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse toward the pursuit of beauty... The negative is the more importunate' [Eliot, 1969: 143]. He proposed that the 'original dramatic impulse' is 'neither comic nor tragic. The comic element, or the antecedent of the comic, is perhaps present, together with the tragic, in all savage or primitive art; but comedy and tragedy are late, perhaps impermanent intellectual abstractions' [Eliot, 1923: 11]. This notion was shared by Barnes, who had earlier written that 'one balances between tragedy and comedy, and a draught runs between the two – it is called comment' [Barry, 1987: 238]. Such 'comment' reflects Eliot's enthusiasm towards Baudelaire's idea of the 'absolute comic' who, as Schuchard explains, 'is the superior artist, one who is receptive to absolute ideas and who brings those ideas to bear on the moral degradation of fallen humanity... In depicting the human slide toward the bestial, the absolute comic reveals not only the guttering moral consciousness that separates men from beasts but the horror of man's separation from absolute being' [Schuchard, 1999: 89]. This description clearly echoes the thematic and stylistic position of *Nightwood* and its tragicomic elements, and in particular, its echoes of the Elizabethan grotesque.

Neil Rhodes' describes the Elizabethan grotesque as 'derive[d] from the unstable coalescence of contrary images of the flesh: indulged, abused, purged and damned'

[Rhodes, 1980: 4]. Such a description may be applied throughout Barnes' oeuvre: in the absurd sexual imagery of her 1928 work *The Book of Repulsive Women*, and the 'urban and sophisticated...grotesque, physical energy' of *Ladies Almanack* [Rhodes, 1980: 5]. These depictions of the flesh are almost always inextricably caught up in questions of gender and sexual desire, a self-conscious perversity that follows from Rabelaisian bawdy, to late Victorian decadence. It is *Nightwood's* O'Connor, to whom I shall return, who fits most clearly Rhodes' description of the Elizabethan grotesque, unable to coalesce in his own professional and gendered self-image. His 'prodigious scene in the empty church,' [Barnes, 1985: 3] to which Eliot refers in his introduction, demonstrates this. He asks 'have I been simple like an animal, God, or have I been thinking?' [Barnes, 1985: 188] mixing the 'sacred and profane' [Barnes, 1985: 201] in what Jane Marcus has described as a 'modernist grotesque,' [Broe, 1991: 227] and which seeks to represent 'fantastic hybrids – unimaginable creations composed from incompatible elements...whose only beauty is in their variety and strangeness,' [Rhodes, 1980: 8] with a disconcerting sympathy and sincerity. As Philip McGowan has observed in *American Carnival*, 'whether through natural physicality, added inscriptions, or comparisons with society's "freaks," [Nightwood] is a narrative continually centred in the carnival representation of otherness' [McGowan, 2001: 91]. For Barnes, the otherness that McGowan describes was, in fact, 'life as it is,' and in a letter to Kenneth Burke, she writes 'If you think Dr. O'Connor a "womans [sic] perverse idea of a womanish man-" then you are deplorably uninformed. And what's all this "conversion to perversion to, or inversion?"' [Barnes, 1966: Series II, Box 2, Folder 34]. O'Connor, therefore, is not 'perverse'; rather, as he himself claims, 'there's beauty in permanent mistakes like me,' [Barnes, 1985: 188]. His ambivalent position between the divine and the grotesque,

reflective of the novel as a whole, is in alignment with Eliot's theories with regard to Elizabethan drama.

As he suggests, 'we cannot reprehend a custom but for which one great experiment of the human spirit must have been left unmade, even if we cannot like it; nor can we wholly deplore anything which brings with it some information about the soul' [Eliot, 1968: 27]. He attributes the perverse and macabre imagery of the Elizabethan stage to 'some fundamental release of restraint,' [Eliot, 1968: 33] which one may argue was not truly repeated until the inter-war period of the 1920s, in which both Eliot and Barnes were writing. The contemporary redefinition of gender has been much documented in readings of *Nightwood*. As such, the marginalisation of Robin and Nora's relationship in Eliot's preface has been the focus of much critical displeasure, viewed as a move on Eliot's part to make the novel more suitably fit with his own aesthetic and moral tastes. Accusations by Jane Marcus and Miriam Fuchs that Eliot censored *Nightwood* according to his personal beliefs overlook the tentatively liberal ideas thus far explored in Eliot's criticism. Leigh Gilmore has suggested that 'Eliot's "failure" to describe the novel can be read as a strategy, however unconscious or unintentional, to present expert testimony for a controversial book...to act as both product-endorser and expert witness in a canny mobilization of his authority in the literary marketplace' [Gilmore, 1994: 617]. She illuminates the limits of Eliot's censorship, in which he removed only passages which were overtly 'indecent' with the aim of allowing the novel its audience, unchallenged by the restrictions imposed by the censor. The marginalization of lesbianism in the Preface, however, may be unconsciously linked to the traditions of Elizabethan tragedy. Denise A. Walen's extensive study *Female Homoeroticism in Early Modern Drama* has illuminated the differences in representation between the genres of early modern Drama, noting

that 'tragicomedy and tragedy allowed for serious explorations of female homoerotics and insinuated an apprehension with same-sex desire, while comedy as well as certain tragicomedies maintained a tolerant approach' [Walen, 2005: 81]. Barnes' tragic novel and its ambivalent approach to lesbian desire presents it simultaneously as desired and torturous, reflects the Elizabethan apprehension Walen describes, while the comic exuberance of *Ladies Almanack* revels in its freedom.

In her interview with Arthur Voeglin in 1914, she writes of his desire to 'produce weird, wonderful, Elizabethan things, with poetry of conception, with wizardry of movement, with a glowing, growing, wonderful lure, like a woman's eyes at dusk gleaming through a dimity curtain of Baxter Street (it's only in the back streets that you get the vampire)' [Barry, 1987: 81]. Such a description demonstrates the interweaving of the Elizabethan and a visceral sexuality, at once bawdy and intensely alluring, which this thesis aims to explore, and suggests just one of the ways in which Eliot's reading of Barnes' novel is in accord with her own artistic ideals. Deborah Parsons describes Voeglin's as 'a vision of the possibilities of fantastical performance that differed from the public fascination with the otherness of the grotesque, telling Barnes that he would like to create something weird and extraordinary that the public might not want but that would transcend vulgar American bourgeois taste. The weird, the extraordinary, the unwanted, the transcendent: it is in this sense perhaps that the circus burlesque can challenge and redefine the gender categorization of the social system' [Parsons, 1998: 269]. This impulse to redefinition shall be explored in the following chapter, but it is perhaps prudent to briefly discuss the critical reactions to Eliot's Preface, and his editorial decisions, that have moved back from such 'redefinition' to delimit Barnes and Eliot within the constraints of their respective gender roles.

Miriam Fuchs' essay, 'Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot: Authority, Resistance and Acquiescence,' takes a strong feminist perspective on the development of *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon*. Whether consciously or not, Fuchs plays into Foucauldian paradigms of discourse and power in her discussion of 'the writer-editor interaction.' Generalising, she refers to the 'problems that result when a writer yields repeatedly to an editor who operates as a restrictive mentor and censor,' but, continuing her point, she changes her choice of pronoun without specifically referring to the Barnes-Eliot relationship: 'The writer gives in to her dependence and feels the effects of too close, too long, and too unequal an association. The editor, feeling oversolicitous, loyal, or even guilty for not liking the work, makes decisions he otherwise would not make' [Fuchs, 1993: 301]. This dangerous gendering of the writer-editor relationship not only in relation to Barnes and Eliot, but in all its manifestations, implicitly places Fuchs' model of criticism in the position of 'buying into' models of inequality that feminism attempts to avoid, using the ideological implications of 'feminine' and 'masculine' to denote 'weakness' and 'strength.' Similarly, Fuchs' interpretation implies that Eliot, by virtue of being male, fails to fully understand the female relationships within the novel. She reads this as a result of Eliot's focus squarely on 'Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor' [Barnes, 1985: 118] in his Preface to the novel, but somehow fails to take into account O'Connor's own confused gender, as 'the last woman left in this world' [Barnes, 1985: 145].

Frann Michel also implies an impassable divide between the masculine and conservative, and feminine and radical, to the detriment of the novel, whose discourse 'subtly disrupts the masculine symbolic order.' Michel continues, 'the appeal the book holds for so conservative a spokesman for traditional culture as T.S. Eliot suggests the

price of the story's engagement with that order. Robin's collapse at the end of the novel signals a kind of defeat of the feminine by the masculine order, the feminine's inability to overcome or persistently coexist with the masculine' [Michel, 1989: 48]. Michel's feminist analysis is also problematic; for while Daniela Caselli has convincingly argued that Barnes' writing 'does not endorse a feminine language as an antidote to history's official heterosexual assumptions and yet fails to believe in a transparent means of communication which escapes gendered ideology,' [Caselli, 2009: 52] the 'masculine symbolic order' that Michel describes is surely indebted to the complex and controversial work of Luce Irigaray, which situates the feminine as located in the pre-Oedipal and outside of such a symbolic order [Whitford, 1991: 75]. Michel's argument for the placement of Barnes squarely in the feminine is outweighed by Caselli's suggestion that Barnes' writing admits the differences between the masculine and feminine, but does not position itself as feminist. Rather, Barnes experiments with language and style, creating a style that, while not necessarily 'transparent,' seems to attempt to blur such definitive, yet arbitrary, divisions.

While his role in the editing of Barnes' novel has thus been construed as negative, Eliot's reasons for publishing Barnes' novel have been approached more favourably. Georgette Fleischer has argued that Eliot chose to help with the publication of *Nightwood* because he 'identified with its spiritual crisis and because he recognized it as a work of genius' [Fleischer, 1998: 406]. Like Leigh Gilmore, she sees Eliot's removal of controversial or subversive passages not as evidence of prejudice on his part, but as a successful attempt to protect Barnes' novel, with its lesbian erotic longing and O'Connor's contentious narratives, from obscenity charges. Gilmore claims that 'Eliot's "failure" to describe the novel can be read as a strategy, however unconscious or unintentional, to present expert

testimony for a controversial book...to act as both product-endorser and expert witness in a canny mobilization of his authority in the literary marketplace' [Gilmore, 1994: 617]. Fleischer has noted that while Eliot cut most overt references to homosexuality and lesbianism in the text, more oblique euphemistic phrases such as 'the Lily of Killarney' and 'the other woman that God forgot,' remain in the published novel, undermining the critical stance that assumes Eliot was opposed to lesbianism. Similar mitigation is applied to certain of O'Connor's phrases, including 'a fart in a gale of wind; just a humble violet under a cow pad,' further substantiating Gilmore's theory that Eliot's editorial cuts were not motivated so much by a personal agenda as an incisive awareness of the threat of the censor. This is supported by Cheryl J. Plumb's Introduction to her edition of *Nightwood*, which states that while Eliot 'blurred' explicit sexual references and 'a few points that put religion in a bad light,' 'meaning was not changed substantially, though the character of the work was adjusted, the language softened' [Plumb, 1995: xxiii]. It becomes evident from this small sample, therefore, that critical reactions to Barnes and Eliot are diverse and frequently contradictory, and I hope that the following chapter will demonstrate some of the ways in which the two authors were in accord with regards to the presentation of gender and sexuality in their works.

Chapter 2. 'THE ARENA OF THE INDECENT ETERNAL': PERFORMANCE, SACRIFICE AND ABJECTION

The presentation of male and female sexuality for both Barnes and Eliot is highly complex and regularly contradictory, with critical readings of both authors reflecting this accordingly. This chapter aims to explore the nuances of Barnes' and Eliot's approaches to sexuality in both their lives and their work, to demonstrate that for both, the binaries of male and female, masculine and feminine, were anything but clear cut. Central to the thinking of Barnes, Eliot and many of their contemporaries was the idea of gender as performative and distinct from biological sex. This notion pre-empts Judith Butler's claim, in 1990, that '*gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes... The substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence' [Butler, 1990: 33]. It is thus surprising that so many critics of Barnes and Eliot's relationship have based their readings on assumptions that inextricably tie gender to sex, and masculinity to power. They also often reduce notions of womanhood into the virgin/whore dichotomy; yet I suggest that images of women in both Barnes' and Eliot's oeuvres resist this, positioning themselves in a 'space for the woman who looks to build her own perspective' [Warren, 2009: 43]. Similarly, their attitudes towards homosexuality present it from multiple positions, as an inescapable longing, a torturous pleasure and an unavoidable choice. Most importantly, Barnes and Eliot present a lack of understanding between the sexes, yet do not limit it as such; the world they present is one in which any true communication between two individuals, regardless of sex and of gender, is an achievement which can only follow the impossible process of understanding oneself. Sexual relations are thus not a spiritually enriching experience, but one of a continual sacrifice, a gradual

‘extinction of personality’ like that which Eliot suggests is necessary for a work of literature to be subsumed within tradition [Eliot, 1969: 17].

Tony Pinkney has explored in detail Eliot’s representations of women, and concludes that for the poet the woman is ‘a wielder of signs, a suave rhetorician whose linguistic self-possession the poet can only envy and whose command of stylistic resource quells his own stuttering efforts at articulation.’ He continues: ‘as Bloomian precursor the woman incarnates an authority which she at the same moment undermines in Irigarayan fashion: she thus eludes the literary-historical paradigms of the former even as she queries the patriarchal assignment of women to the irrational, which is merely revalorised in the feminist theory of the latter’ [Pinkney, 1984: 24]. This is a considerably more complex interpretation than has been presented in many feminist accounts of Eliot’s women, yet their ambivalent position with regards to language and tradition supports presentations of femininity, and more complex figurations of gender identity, that both Barnes’ and Eliot’s works depict. Their women perform inherited notions of womanhood whilst at the same time deconstructing them from within. As traditional identities break apart, spirituality and the primitive seep through the cracks, both enchanting and destroying their other whilst engaged in the mechanisms of sacrifice. As Cassandra Laity writes:

‘Eliot’s women lead double lives: on the naturalist surface of the plays, they are custodians of a world of stifling civility and banality, whose pretensions to social authority are comically exaggerated or farcically dismissed; in the symbolic subpattern of the plays, they emerge as pursuing and hieratic figures representing the disruptive claims of a higher spiritual reality, to which only the elect few find access.’

[Laity, 2004: 234]

The notion of womanhood as performative can be traced back to the early works of both authors, and their mutual fascination with the vaudeville and music hall celebrity. From Barnes' friendship with the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and her interviews with Mimi Aguglia and Madame Valentine de Saint-Point, to Eliot's admiration for Marie Lloyd and her music hall counterparts, both authors can be seen to ascribe both a personal and artistic importance to the woman in performance. Ronald Schuchard has described Lloyd as a muse to Eliot: 'for seven years she fuelled his creative imagination and had knowingly served as a collaborator for his theory of art. She had achieved as a popular performer what he wished to achieve as an artist – the elevation of crude material to the level of art. She had made a virtue of vulgarity, and in exchange for the sympathy of her lower-class audiences she gave a kind of moral expression to their lives' [Schuchard, 1999: 106]. In Lloyd, then, the principles of Eliot's dramatic ideal came to life, uniting the simple gratification of entertainment with the skill and beauty of great art. This is not unlike Felix's observation of Robin in *Nightwood*, as he 'was surprised that often her taste, turning from an appreciation of the most beautiful, would also include the cheaper and debased, with an emotion as real' [Barnes, 1985: 65]. The inclusiveness of Eliot's thinking, evident in his teaching of classics to working class reading groups in London, is often ignored, sitting uncomfortably as it does with critical notions of modernism as erudite and elitist. While his poetry demands education of the reader to burrow through its intricate allusiveness, access to art as a form of moral and aesthetic education was encouraged by Eliot. As he writes in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 'the most useful poetry, socially, would be one which could cut across all the present stratifications of public taste – stratifications which are perhaps a sign of

social disintegration. The ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social 'usefulness' for poetry, is the theatre' [Eliot, 1986: 153].

In his last 'London Letter' of 1922, Eliot wrote that Lloyd's 'audiences were invariably sympathetic, and it was through this sympathy that she controlled them' [Eliot, 1969: 456]. The notion of 'control' may appear to suggest something of masculinity – or witchcraft – about the woman on the stage, but Lloyd's appeal lay in a higher power. He continues:

'I consider her superiority over other performers to be in a way of moral superiority: it was her understanding of the people and sympathy with them, and the people's recognition of the fact that she embodied the virtues which they genuinely most respected in private life, that raised her to the position she occupied in her death... The working man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art.'

[Eliot, 1969: 458]

Thus in Marie Lloyd's performance a powerful reciprocity emerges between performer and audience which is echoed in Barnes' 1915 interview with the actress Ruth Royce, 'Greatest "Nut" in Vaudeville.' She writes of their encounter that 'you are not a visitor, you are a second mirror. In other words, she does not seduce you; she welcomes you. She does not place before you a finale, but a personality' [Barry, 1987: 146]. Unlike earlier fictional representations of music hall performers, including Miriam Rooth in Henry James's *The Tragic Muse* (1890) and Sybil Vane in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), these real-life actresses are multidimensional to their observers, not merely existing as beautiful spectacles in a male gaze, but as engaging, living performers with the potential to elicit powerful emotion and an awakening of self-consciousness in both a male and female audience. The interaction between the woman in performance

and her audience appears, however, singular to this situation. Throughout Barnes and Eliot's oeuvres, there is a distinct lack of genuine communication between any two individuals; and *Nightwood's* Nora lives in 'fear of that moment when [Robin] would turn her words, making them something that nobody else could possibly share' [Barnes, 1985: 203]. It seems that the spiritual communion between individuals becomes feared and avoided, for it comes at the cost of individual subjectivity. The actress places herself at risk in the 'collaboration' made possible only through art.

In an interview with the director David Belasco, Barnes writes that he spoke of the profession as 'the highest, the hardest, and the most torturous, for a woman has to give up everything. There cannot be two great passions in an actress's life; she cannot both love a man and her art at the same time. It is impossible! It is suicide! By the wayside so many have fallen, so many of still rarer talents than many who have achieved final recognition and distinction; so many with such great gifts that they were destroyed by their very immensity' [Barry, 1987: 191]. For Belasco, then, the woman on the stage is engaged in an act of self-sacrifice, a theme that recurs throughout Barnes' and Eliot's oeuvres. The performance of sexuality is presented as both the sacrifice of oneself, and in certain individuals able to inspire others to sacrifice themselves in order to attain it. Both religious and bestial, 'the passion that was all renunciation' [Barnes, 1985: 147] is Dionysian in its hedonism, and tragic in its results. Leo Bersani's description of desire bears many similarities with the experiences of the lovers of Robin Vote, in that 'the object of desire [becomes] the very experience of *ebroulement* or self-shattering. The need to repeat that experience can be thought of as an originary sublimation, as the first deflection of the sexual instinct from an object-fixated activity to another, "higher" aim. "Higher" here, however, would have no connotation whatsoever of reparation or

restitution; instead it signifies a primitive but immensely significant move from fragmented objects to totalities, a move taking place at this stage as a form of self-reflexiveness' [Bersani, 1990: 37]. The shattering of selfhood that takes place in desire is more literally enacted on the stage, as actress becomes character in order to achieve the 'higher aim' of art. Jenny Petherbridge, *Nightwood's* 'Squatter,' is lost within the matrix of love felt and love performed, and Barnes' portrayal of Jenny is scathing – as Eliot would later write, 'love compels cruelty/To those who do not understand love' [Eliot, 2004: 337]. She writes, 'she had the fluency of tongue and action meted out by divine providence to those who cannot think for themselves. She was the master of the over-sweet phrase, the over-tight embrace. One inevitably thought of her in the act of love emitting florid commedia dell'arte ejaculations; one should not have thought of her in the act of love at all' [Barnes, 1985: 102]. Her descriptions of Jenny are full of references to performance and theatricality, and her sacrifices merely superficial, wearing out great loves and moving on, until she meets Robin Vote, the subject of her final obsession. She is thus presented as less human than Nora, Robin, and the doctor, and her pathetic final scene extinguishing and re-lighting a candle lit by Robin moments before is a mere shadow of Nora and Robin's final moments in the chapel.

Eliot's depiction of Celia in *The Family Reunion* bears many relations to both Nora and Robin in Barnes' *Nightwood*. Her discussions with the doctor regarding the dissolution of her relationship with Edward echo Nora's 'sessions' with O'Connor; yet the grotesque sacrifice of her fate, her 'profane illumination' [Chisholm, 1997: 167] are seemingly infused with the shadow of Robin Vote and the close of *Nightwood*. She asks Reilly, 'can we only love something created by our own imagination?' before describing Edward as 'like a child who has wandered into a forest,' [Eliot, 2004: 416]. In the eyes of Julia,

however, it is Celia who possesses the child-like innocence that Celia attributes to Edward, and that both Nora and Felix attribute to Robin. Of Celia's journey, Julia says 'she will be afraid of nothing' she will not even know/That there is anything to be afraid of... She will pass between the scolding hills,/Through the valley of derision, like a child sent on an errand/In eagerness and patience. Yet she must suffer' [Eliot, 2004: 421]. 'The Possessed,' the final chapter of *Nightwood*, shows Robin in a similar light and shares much imagery with Julia's description of Celia's fatal pilgrimage. 'You don't know the process by which the human is/Transhumanised,' she claims suggesting both the description of Robin as the 'beast turning human,' [Barnes, 1985: 59] and her 'going down' at the altar, in a grotesque subversion of the Catholic ritual of transubstantiation. This subversiveness is employed by Eliot in his description of Celia as 'crucified/Very near an ant-hill,' [Eliot, 2004: 434], a description supposedly cut down in revisions but retaining its gruesome foundation. Celia's death is easily comparable with Robin's sacrilegious final scene in the chapel, for in the act of female sacrifice, the body of the desired woman is transformed and perverted, yet pressed into religious iconography. For both authors, therefore, the aesthetics of female sacrifice invoke scenes presented in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, in which women are wedded to Gods and idolized before the ritual of their death. Of course, this is a fundamentally misogynistic image that perpetuates the structures of patriarchal authority; yet it is also possible to view it as an image appropriated by Eliot and Barnes to show the presence of the divine primitivism in their representations of women. Referring to Celia's death, Eliot writes:

'such experience can only be hinted at
In myths and images. To speak about it
We talk of darkness, labyrinths, Minotaur terrors.
But that world does not take the place of ours.'

[Eliot, 2004: 438]

Thus the two worlds meet in Celia's 'profane illumination,' as an experience that cannot be translated into language, yet is omnipresent in the figure of the sacrificed woman. Richard Badenhause has noted in an earlier scene a manifestation of the Kristevan semiotic in Celia, and thus highlights a further similarity between she and Robin Vote: both struggle with, and are distanced from, everyday language. He observes that in her final appearance, in Reilly's office, 'Celia struggles for the appropriate language to describe her condition, for she has cast off the insecurities that previously controlled her actions in the environment of the cocktail party, where casual banter functioned as a kind of substitute religion. This revolutionary discourse rejects the privileging of the phallic position by flaunting its nonlinearity, and its incessant proximity to syntactical collapse' [Badenhause, 2004: 210]. Badenhause's description, one may argue, might be said to describe *Nightwood* in its entirety; yet even by Barnes' linguistic standards, Robin is remote.

Robin both enacts and induces female sacrifice in the novel, as a primal impulse that cannot be evaded. Barnes describes her as 'the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache – we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers' [Barnes, 1985: 60]. This feeling of the viewing subject is not caused by any conscious effort on Robin's part; her mechanisms of attraction seem unperformed, whilst at the same time being those of a woman 'who presents herself to the spectator as a 'picture' forever arranged [Barnes, 1985: 59]. Robin is thus both fragile surface and most fathomless depth, like the states with which she is most commonly aligned: laughter and sleep. As she kneels alone in the church, Barnes writes, 'she laughed, out of

some hidden capacity, some lost subterranean humour; as it ceased, she leaned still further forward in a swoon, waking and yet heavy, like one in a sleep' [Barnes, 1985: 73]. Barnes uses laughter to express the subconscious and its power to break free of repression, endowed as it is with unknown meaning, as both an uncontrollable urge and a social tool for interaction. Sheryl Stephenson has placed this in the context of gender, writing that in *Ryder*, 'female laughter and abuse consistently undermine male authority' [Broe, 1991: 86]. Tony Pinkney notes a similar spectacle in the often overlooked early poem by Eliot, 'Hysteria.' He writes: 'not only does this female laughter deconstruct the binary oppositions of self and other, subject and object; it equally turns inside out the triangular structures of patriarchal authority in its own miniature version of Bakhtinian carnival' [Pinkney, 1984: 21]. The suggestion of a Bakhtinian subversiveness in Eliot's work has been extensively explored by Li-Min Yang in *Dialogism and Carnivalisation in the Work of T.S. Eliot: A Bakhtinian Reading*, and Jane Marcus, Deborah Parsons, and Philip Greenwood have all extensively discussed the presence of the grotesque and carnivalesque in Barnes' work. However, an example used by Mikhail Bakhtin in his 1973 *Rabelais and His World*, I believe, suggests an aspect of Barnes' novel and Eliot's aesthetics that has been hitherto overlooked.

Bakhtin discusses an 1804 novel by Ernst August Friedrich Klingemann, written under the pseudonym of Bonaventura. This work is entitled *The Night Watches* and from this Bakhtin quotes: 'is there a more potent means than laughter to resist the mockeries of the world and fate? The most powerful enemy experiences terror at the sight of this satirical mask, and misfortune itself retreats before me, if I dare laugh at it. What else indeed except laughter does this earth deserve, may the devil take it! together with its sensitive companion, the moon,' [Bakhtin, 1984: 38]. St. Bonaventure, from whom

Klingemann draws his pseudonym, was a twelfth century Franciscan minister canonized in 1482, and was known as the 'Seraphic Doctor,' [Cousins, 1978: xiii]. Bakhtin explains that 'the storyteller of the "Night Watches" is the son of the devil, while his mother is a canonized saint. The night watchman himself laughs in church and weeps in the bordello. Thus the ancient popular derision of divinity and medieval humor become in the early nineteenth century the sardonic laughter in church of a lonely eccentric' [Bakhtin, 1984: 41]. The chapter of Nora's confessional with the doctor is entitled 'Watchman, What of the Night?' and I suggest that in O'Connor, Barnes draws upon the composite novelist/saint by whom *The Night Watches* purports to have been written. Caught between whom he is, and whom he claims to be; delivering subversive sermons of love and despair; and eternally wavering between the holy and the abject, O'Connor embodies the 'lonely eccentric' that Bakhtin describes, and 'Bonaventura' creates. Whether Eliot would have been aware of this allusion is a matter of uncertainty; for while it is likely that he was aware of St. Bonaventure, who is present in the Anglo-Catholic Calendar of Saints. An awareness of *The Night Watches*, however, is less likely, though by no means impossible; and Eliot's early works demonstrate the same impulse to 'forgo his angels that he may capture the beast' [Barnes, 1985: 13].

Eliot's early poems, 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian,' and 'The Death of St. Narcissus,' have been largely ignored, yet demonstrate a side to Eliot that found inspiration in abjection. The use of religious figures and associated iconography to describe an almost pre-Oedipal beauty and pleasure removes them from an immediate biographical context; rather, the repression that these poems present is universalized, as a part of the path to redemption. For example, Eliot's 'Saint Sebastian' says:

‘after hour on hour of prayer
And torture and delight
Until my blood should ring the lamp
And glisten in the light;
I should arise your neophyte’

[McDiarmid, 2003: 15].

That St. Sebastian is renewed by his experience presents a form of sexual baptism, through which he departs from suffering through the spilling of blood. Sexuality is, of course, universal to humans as animals, and necessary for the propagation of the species; yet in Eliot’s puritanical upbringing it was fiercely denied any sense of pleasure. As he writes in his preface to Barnes’ novel, ‘in the Puritan morality that I remember, it was tacitly assumed that...failure was due to some weakness or perversity in the individual.’ He continues, however, that ‘all of us, so far as we attach ourselves to created objects and surrender our wills to temporal ends, are eaten of the same worm. Taken in this way, *Nightwood* appears with profounder significance. To regard this group of people as a horrid sideshow of freaks is not only to miss the point, but to confirm our wills and harden our hearts in an inveterate sin of pride’ [Barnes, 1985: vi]. Thus St. Sebastian and St. Narcissus remain saints; as Eliot writes, Narcissus ‘became a dancer to God,/Because his flesh was in love with the burning arrows’ [McDiarmid, 2003: 6]. His daring surrender, their perverse submission and love that is suffering, for the young Eliot, epitomized religious sacrifice. It would also come to form his view of love between individuals – not unlike Barnes, who, in a letter to Emily Coleman, wrote that ‘suffering for love is how I have learned practically everything I know, love of grandmother up and on’ [Brandel, 2002].

Describing the period prior to Eliot’s mental breakdown in 1922, Ronald Schuchard writes that Eliot had begun to ‘live out a Jacobean nightmare of sexual mortality... [His]

perception of Russell's calculating lust, Vivien's vicious infidelity, and the eternal consequence of their betrayal brought on a horrific moment, a recurring phantasma that would thereafter suffuse the fabric of his work with sounds and scenes of sexual betrayal and violence' [Schuchard, 1999: 124]. This 'recurring phantasma,' a Freudian 'compulsion to repeat,' echoes the circularity of Barnes' novel *Nightwood*, in particular the experience of both Nora and Dr. O'Connor. It also echoes that of Barnes herself, as her novel *Ryder* and late play *The Antiphon* both appear to be in some sense a cathartic response to her own childhood trauma and unstable family life. The choice to recreate their traumas through their art is complex and contradictory, suggesting a desire to overcome the other and regain their individuality.

Eliot's decision to represent his relationship with his first wife Vivien, though somewhat obliquely, in *The Family Reunion*, has been negatively received by Haigh-Wood biographer Carole Seymour-Jones. She writes: 'as soon as Vivien was safely behind bars, the play was performed in 1939. In it Eliot takes his revenge upon Vivien, and upon his mother. His play was as much a sponge in prussic acid, as the revenge drama *Djuna* Barnes wrote after seeing *The Family Reunion* – *The Antiphon*... Instantly recognized as the author's wife, the play seemed to justify the murder of such a crazed, demonic creature' [Seymour-Jones, 2001: 563]. That she links *The Family Reunion* with *The Antiphon*, yet not *Nightwood*, suggests a blindness to the revenge aspect of Barnes' novel that in some way subverts the possibility of an alternative influence between the two. The turmoil that resulted from his relationship with Vivien is not unlike that depicted in Barnes' novel; and his increasingly fragile state of mental health during the composition of *The Waste Land* was perhaps similar to Nora's anguished question to O'Connor, 'have you ever loved someone and it became yourself?' [Barnes, 1985: 152]. The inability to

divide between self and other, this loss of individual subjectivity I believe reflects Kristeva's theory of abjection in which the child must abject the mother in order to separate from her. At the close of the novel, when Nora and Robin are reunited in the chapel, Robin apparently devolves into the beast which, it is suggested, lurks in her character throughout the novel. This is the point at which Barnes seems to enact her revenge; for as Robin has made Nora into an abject Madonna, Barnes makes Robin into an abject Thelma. Thus if we interpret the doomed relationships of Barnes and Thelma Wood, and Eliot and Vivien, as ones in which subjectivity is compromised as in the development of the child in relation to its mother, we may reflect that by abjecting the fictional symbolic embodiment of their partners, Barnes and Eliot were able to once again see themselves as individuals.

Nora's revelation towards the close of the novel, as she discovers herself to have been made 'into the Madonna,' positions lesbian desire as both sacred and abject. She tells the doctor: 'looking from her to the Madonna behind the candles, I knew that the image, to her, was what I had been to Robin, not a saint at all, but a fixed dismay, the space between the human and the holy head, the arena of the 'indecent' eternal. At that moment I stood in the centre of eroticism and death' [Barnes, 1985: 222]. This position, I believe, was occupied by Eliot in his early poems, and may be linked to the repressed homosexuality latent in his work as suggested by critics such as Monica Faltejskova and Colleen Lamos. Rather than assuming that Eliot's presumed homosexuality would make him more sympathetic to the characters in Barnes' novel, Faltejskova takes quite the opposite approach:

'Eliot's homosexual tendencies and the struggle to repress them, evident in both his poetry and biographical material, partially stood behind his sexual

neurasthenia about women and his physical revulsion of women, which formed his violent misogyny... [which in turn] led to 'literary misogyny': it was partially because he feared both women and being considered effeminate that Eliot declared an impersonal, hard and masculine practice of art, and dismissed women's writing as ill-fitted for such definition of literature' [Faltejskova, 2010: 75].

As we have seen, Eliot's support of both male and female artists depended not on their sex, but on literary merit and their fulfillment of his aesthetic criteria; yet it is difficult to deny that both Eliot and Barnes took an ambivalent attitude towards the presentation of homosexuality in their works. Barnes has regularly been classified as a lesbian writer, a label which she actively opposed throughout her life, to the point of making homophobic statements late in life in an attempt to extricate herself from the term. Barnes, of course, had lesbian relationships, not only with Thelma Wood but also with Mary Pyne and Natalie Barney, but she refused to be defined by her sexuality alone. She was almost married twice; and her virginity was taken by a friend of her father's at a young age. To be thus reduced, confined to a singular definition, was constraining for Barnes and opposed to her definition of love, reflected in her claim that 'I might be anything, if a horse loved me, I might be that' [Herring, 1995: xix]. However, Barnes was no stranger to homosexual subcultures, as her 1928 chapbook *Ladies Almanack* documents and satirises through an impenetrable parody the salon of Paris socialite, Natalie Barney. As Daniela Caselli notes, in the chapbook 'the lesbian is never offered as a spectacle to be 'savoured' because it is not opposed to heterosexual normality: as can be observed in Barnes' journalism, any form of representation is inherently spectacular' [Caselli, 2008: 39]. The issue of representation for Barnes' characters, if not for their author, is fraught with complexity, as they implicitly draw upon earlier notions of how transgender and homosexual identities were constructed in their attempts to forge new identities of their own.

Chronologically bound between the repressed attitude of the Victorian era and the liberation that was to follow in the late twentieth century, and with the shadow of the Wilde trials looming in the cultural consciousness, it is hardly surprising that representations of gender and homosexual desire for these writers would be complex. This led to a positioning of the homosexual as either non-existent unless framed in Classical allusion, or as a subculture existing beneath the understanding of the conservative public. They inhabited a classical underworld, indebted to darkness and performativity in order to share a love both perverse and sacred. They thus create their own genealogy in the absence of a socially accepted position, manifesting in a selfhood that is a composite of fragments with which they may identify, a matrix of literary identities and subcultural acts held together by an inescapable longing which, ironically, leaves them to hold together the disintegrating parts of a world of supposedly stable identities. In *Ryder*, for instance, Barnes writes, ‘a peewit called alone from across the lands, and no bird answered, “Watchman, what of the night?”’ and Dr. O’Connor appears, still espousing his wisdom, and thus creating a self-referential genealogy within Barnes’ works [Barnes, 1990: 158].

As Ed Madden has suggested, Eliot’s perceived emphasis upon O’Connor in his reading of the novel is likely to be, at least in part, due to the doctor’s similarities with the Tiresias figure in Eliot’s own *The Waste Land*. In his notes to the poem, Eliot claims – possibly ironically – that ‘Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a ‘character’ is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest’ [Eliot, 2004: 78]. He represents the image of sexual disenchantment, both involved with and disengaged from the scene he describes. Eliot writes: ‘I, Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs,/Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest,’ he writes, having ‘foresuffered all/Enacted on this same

divan or bed' [Eliot, 2004: 68]. Madden has demonstrated that Barnes' later poetry admits the influence upon her O'Connor, and he highlights a removed scene in which the doctor witnesses the copulation of snakes – a direct reference to the Tiresias myth. Of this scene he writes that 'central to O'Connor's Tiresian vision is the tension between the normative and marginal histories - the imperial castle and the ashes (and toilets) it hides, the punitive hand of the law and the "dark" hand of pleasure. Also central are the homoerotic and the feminine: two kings and two queens. However, the persistent coding and euphemism - the "tea caddy," the two "queens, and "Tiny" - suggest that this Tiresian voice may be misread, if attention is not paid to the particular subcultural contexts from which it derives' [Madden, 2008: 185]. Whether or not Eliot was alert to the full implications of Barnes' language, to return to his attribution of Renaissance concerns to her novel provides a useful paradigm through which to view its most complex characters, Matthew O'Connor and Robin Vote.

While Robin Vote embodies the mythic unity of the classical androgyne, Dr. O'Connor may be seen to reflect its 'ridiculous' counterpart in classical satire, and later, on the Renaissance stage. Grace Tiffany has suggested that 'while the mythic beast/monster is something more than an individual man or woman, the satiric beast/monster is considerably less. The mythic beast is semidivine; the satiric beast is simply half-human.' She continues: 'satiric androgynous beasts never signify the necessary unity of two (or more) persons, but only the illegitimate effeminization or masculinisation of one' [Tiffany, 2005: 56]. O'Connor's desire to be the stereotypical woman and his absurd attempt to appear as one when alone, contrasts with Robin Vote's appeal both to male and female acquaintances, inspiring love and lust in all the characters – except for O'Connor, her ironised sexual counterpart. The opposing images of womanhood

internalized and represented by these characters also ironises and subverts expectations: while O'Connor longs for 'children and knitting...to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar,' Robin rejects her child and cannot be controlled by the constraints of marriage, nor by those of the church. Her pure and unconscious, wild and yet innocent sexuality is wholly unperformed, unlike that of Dr. O'Connor, who as Nora observes 'dresses to lie beside himself, who is so constructed that love, for him, can be only something special' [Barnes, 1985: 116]. She wonders, however: 'is not the gown the natural raiment of extremity? What nation, what religion, what ghost, what dream has not worn it – infants, angels, priests, the dead; why should not the doctor, in the grave dilemma of his alchemy, wear his dress?' [Barnes, 1985: 117]. O'Connor's costume invites comparisons with the 'women' on the Elizabethan stage, played by young men in costume who would switch from one role to another throughout any given performance. This has been explored at length by critics of Elizabethan drama, with Laura Levine best summarising that 'the male actor, dressed in women's clothing, seemed to lack an inherent gender, and this seemed to make him monstrous' [Levine, 1994: 12]. When Nora encounters O'Connor alone, dressed as a woman, she remarks 'God, children know something they can't tell, they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!' [Barnes, 1985: 117]. O'Connor's homosexuality – indeed, the whole construction of his selfhood – thus makes him an uncanny counterpart to idealized sexual desire.

As Barnes writes: "And do I know my Sodomites?" the doctor said unhappily, 'and what the heart goes up against if it loves one of them, especially if it's a woman loving one of them. What do they find then, that this lover has committed the unpardonable error of not being able to exist – and they come down with a dummy in their arms' [Barnes,

1985: 135]. The image of the dummy invokes the Freudian uncanny in its character seemingly one step removed from the human, which both subverts and engulfs the state of narcissistic desire. Nora and Robin's doll, too, is the uncanny manifestation of their love – as Nora says, 'we give death to a child when we give it a doll – it's the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane,' to which O'Connor eventually responds: 'the doll and the immature have something right about them, the doll because it resembles but does not contain life, and the third sex because it contains life but resembles the doll. The blessed face! It should be seen only in profile, otherwise it is observed to be the conjunction of the identical cleaved halves of sexless misgiving' [Barnes, 1985: 209]. For *Nightwood's* cast, then, the figure of the doll is a fundamental part of the homosexual discourse. It represents the intimacy that cannot truly be realised, a lover that is made uncanny and is thus intimately estranged. As the unrealisable child, it is perhaps a precursor to the late twentieth century practice of 'barebacking' as observed by Bersani and Phillips in *Intimacies* [Bersani, 2008], and corollary to the homosociality of tradition as explored by Eliot – it is necessarily both a continuation and a death. Bersani writes that 'to the extent that it embodies, both through and beyond death, the desire to maintain an intergenerational brotherhood, barebacking, for all its ethical ambiguities, is a ritual of sacrificial love' [Bersani, 2008: 55]. Barnes' vision reflects Paul de Man's 1973 statement that 'to make the invisible visible is uncanny' [Royle, 108] – she embodies the 'lack' in homosexuality – that is, to conceive – and in the process also illuminates the darkest corners of homosexual culture at its most abject. Thus with the grotesque romanticizing of homosexuality we are returned to Bakhtin and Bonaventura, as the former speaks of the 'tragic doll' and the 'Romantic mask [which] loses almost entirely its regenerating

and renewing element and acquires a somber hue. A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it' [Bakhtin, 1984: 40]. However, as April Horner has observed, the 'family' relations presented in the *Nightwood* are not conformative, and yet not necessarily negative. She observes:

'Several 'trinities' replace the holy trinity of father, mother and child: Jenny, Robin and the child Sylvia; Robin, Nora and the doll; Felix, Frau Mann and young Guido; Nora, Robin and the dog. Despite the emotional anguish of these triads, such 'families' are seen as no more damaging than the conventional nuclear family... Certainly the novel seeks to strip away the patina of cultural idealisation from 'the family' in order to reveal its power dynamics as inherently exploitative and destructive.'

[Horner, 2001: 80]

The element of destruction that must necessarily counterpoint creation informs both authors' understanding both of their own families, and their wider social and literary contexts. Therefore, the representation of the family, and the complexity of representing the wider literary genealogy that for Barnes and Eliot is both all and nothing, is the subject of my final chapter.

Chapter 3. THE ENSEMBLE CAST: QUEENS, FOOLS AND RITUALS

From descriptions of Eliot as the 'avatar of conservative patriarchal modernism' [Halpern, 1997: 2], one may assume that his plays were replete with stereotypical depictions of commandeering patriarchal authority, and submissive, oppressed women. As we have seen so far, however, Eliot's images of sexuality across the gender divide are deeply complex. Not more so than those of Barnes, whose apparently incestuous relationship with her grandmother Zadel, and her position at odds with her mother's system of belief, colour many of her works and are most prominent in *Ryder* and *The Antiphon*. Both Barnes' final work, and Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party* and *The Confidential Clerk* present an image of the family revolving around the figure of the matriarch, herself in some way unstable yet ever attempting to control those around her. She is surrounded by a supporting cast of doctors and fools (who are often the same), and those invited into the family drama are forced into playing 'an unread part in some monstrous farce, ridiculous in some monstrous pantomime,' [Eliot, 2004: 291]. They perform their parts self-consciously, choosing either to adhere without deviation to, or subversively abandon, the expectations such roles contain. This chapter seeks to explore the world of these queens and fools in relation to modernist notions of tradition and genealogy, uniting the themes of the previous chapters by drawing together notions of heredity and sacrifice, and their relevance to the early twentieth century zeitgeist as explored by Eliot and Barnes.

Both authors were aware of the constructed nature of womanhood, and their representations of the myth of motherhood show an unsympathetic attitude towards the roles chosen by both their fictional, and real-life, mothers. For Anne B. Dalton, Barnes

‘characterises the maternal figures throughout *Ryder*, *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon* as women who choose to deny and repress their memories of the past, and who feel threatened by the daughter’s desire to remember and exorcise the trauma engendered by the family’ [Dalton, 1993: 119]. However, while Dalton sees this as a response to Barnes’ mother’s apparently indifferent attitude to her own daughter’s rape, a very similar situation is enacted in Eliot’s *The Family Reunion*, as Amy insistently attempts to repress the story of the death of Harry’s wife. This is not, however, a simple manifestation of misogyny or abjection of the mother, as Amy’s sister Agatha proves to have saved Harry and his mother from death at the hands of his father while Harry was still in the womb. Agatha, like many of Eliot’s women, separates appearance and ontology, as she tells Harry:

‘What people know me as,
The efficient principle of a women’s college -
That is the surface. There is a deeper
Organisation, which your question disturbs.’

[Eliot, 2004: 331]

While Agatha is consistent with Barnes’ and Eliot’s representations of womanhood as inherently divided, there is a further manifestation of female dualisms in their works, almost entirely confined to maternal figures. Both authors compulsively present situations in which two women may lay claim to the ‘mothering’ of an individual character. Often one is biologically related but fundamentally flawed, while the other is more distantly related, yet possesses, or promises, a spiritual affinity with their adopted child. This is, of course, in accord with the Christian opposition of the biological mother and the Virgin Mary, which dominated Eliot’s thinking. It is also, however, reflective of Barnes’ own unusual family. Her mother was second in her affections to her

grandmother Zadel, and her father's decision to take a second wife further complicated her maternal relations, which Andrew Field has suggested is reflected in the refracted naming of Barnes' characters [Field, 1983: 26]. A pattern thus emerges, in these authors' works, of a maternal duality: Nora, Jenny, and Robin; Nora, Robin and the doll; Amy, Agatha and Harry; Augusta, Victoria and Miranda; Amelia, Kate and Julie; and even Lady Elizabeth, Mrs. Guzzard and Colby. In all these relationships there are two mother figures, and one child, yet perhaps the most interesting is O'Connor's relation with God and the Virgin Mary. Of the former, he says: 'pray to the good God, she will keep you. Personally I call her "she" because of the way she made me. It somehow balances the mistake' [Barnes, 1985: 212]. Jacqueline Pollard has offered an illuminating analysis of his pleas to the Virgin Mary, highlighting their allusions to the Bible, in particular John 19. In reference to the passage in which O'Connor claims, "It's my mother without argument that I want!" And then in his loudest voice he roared: 'Mother of God! I wanted to be your son – the unknown beloved second would have done!' [Barnes, 1985: 149], Pollard writes that 'O'Connor returns to the original verses in John, which cloak "the beloved disciple" in anonymity... In O'Connor's view, such anonymity – the "unknown beloved second" illustrates his need: while he earlier longed to be John, the named apostle, he now longs to be the unknown other – just as long as he is beloved' [Pollard, 2009: 128]. Thus while one mother makes, another loves; and while the influence of the former weighs heavy on the individual, the latter offers hope in the possibility of validation. It is all too easy, however, to be overwhelmed by the dominance of the biological, and in Barnes' and Eliot's works it becomes clear that this motherhood can impose an inescapable threat to selfhood. As *The Family Reunion's* Harry asks, 'what about my mother?/Everything has always referred back to my mother' [Eliot, 2004:

317]. For Kristeva, the maternal is ‘the ambivalent principle that is bound to the species, on the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable that one imagines as femininity, nonlanguage, or body’ [Kristeva, 1983: 235]. This link between femininity and unnameability, however, is challenged by the fact that Barnes and Eliot both learned their greatest skills, and acquired their most powerful weapon, from their dominant maternal figures – the ability to write.

Barnes learned to write from her grandmother, Zadel, whose correspondence was both excessively intimate and oddly distancing, a technique employed in much of Barnes’ work. Their letters contained lewd jokes and references ostensibly to the sexual joys of their sharing a bed, alongside instructions for work on the family farm and housekeeping duties [Herring, 1995: 55]. Zadel’s literary credentials as poet and journalist allowed the young Barnes a model for her own aspirations. In Ryder, however, Zadel’s penchant for storytelling is satirized, though affectionately, and she returns as a memory in *The Antiphon* as ‘a faulty scholar, but a witty one’ [Barnes, 2000: 105]. The sexually ‘liberated’ Barnes household could not have been more distant from that of the Eliot family. The young Eliot learned poetry from the hand of his mother, herself an aspiring poet whose images of ‘the beatific light, the fires of lust and purgation, the pilgrimage across the ‘desert waste’, and the seasonal metaphor for spiritual drought’ were, for Lyndall Gordon, ‘rescued...from triteness’ by the later poetry of her son [Gordon, 1977: 5]. He quotes a poem by Charlotte Eliot, which, he suggests, reveals the root of Eliot’s later sexual repression and discomfort in desire:

‘Purge from thy heart all sensual desire,
Let low ambitions perish in the fire

Of higher aims. Then, as the transient dies,
The eternal shall unfold before thine eyes
The fleeting hours will grant thee thy request:
Take thou immortal gifts and leave the rest.'

[Gordon, 1977: 99].

The influence of such verses on Eliot's later poetry is clear - the mother's cleavage of the transient and eternal, fleeting and immortal, became her son's more fluid oppositions of the timeless and the temporal. That Eliot lived his mother's dream of becoming a poet must surely have weighed to some degree upon his 'high' ambition, and was translated into his desire at the opening of *Ash Wednesday*, reduced to a pile of bones, flesh eaten away by leopards, in sacrifice to the Virgin Mary. The act of sacrifice to the Holy Mother is a common trope throughout Western literature, but in the early twentieth century, following Freud, writers such as Barnes and Eliot were representing the sacrifice rather to an unholy mother, a figure who reaches her zenith in Barnes' and Eliot's late plays, but who also weaves in and out of their earlier works. Both authors depict an economy of motherhood which creates a debt that can never be paid. Miranda claims that 'every mother, in extortion for her milk -/With the keyhole iris of the cat - draws blood' [Barnes, 2000: 184]. Augusta also declares that 'Miranda's all Augusta laid up in Miranda/Born again to be my new account,' [Barnes, 2000: 97] and *The Confidential Clerk's* Colby similarly claims that 'just when we think we have settled our account/Life presents a new one, more difficult to pay' [Eliot, 2004: 467]. However, he contrasts this with an apparently equally negative loneliness:

'Just when you think you're on the point of release
From loneliness, then loneliness swoops down upon you;
When you think you're getting out, you're getting further in,
And you know at last that there's no escape.'

[Eliot, 2004: 478]

The idea of a selfhood freed from the strictures of family and relationality is thus presented as impossible, and Colby faces a loneliness that is the result of company. He precedes Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* when he claims, 'I should like a father/Whom I have never known and didn't know now' [Eliot, 2004: 513], though Colby's drama of influence is somewhat ironic, as the affable Sir Claude Mulhammer is anything but oppressive and offers little outside of the usual father/son relationship.

Conversely, the descent of *The Antiphon*'s Augusta, and the entrapment of her daughter, Miranda, in her death, presents an alarming contravention of the assumed roles in the mother/daughter relationship. As Augusta descends into insanity and death, she moves from a position of power to one of submission, yet where her 'successor,' in a semi-Oedipal construction, should assume the continuation of power, Miranda is wilfully engaged in their mutual destruction. Like the workings of the Oedipus complex, it seems that Miranda's actions are to some extent pre-ordained. As Jack Blow observes, before coming home, Miranda seemed 'thoroughly performed - /The last tension one notes in tragediennes/Who've left the tragic gesture to the stage,/And so go forth alone to meet disaster' [Barnes, 2000: 39]. Miranda's return home, seemingly aware of the fate that would await her, suggests a subconscious desire to die. *The Antiphon*, indeed, is replete with Freudian notions of death and return, best summarized by Nicholas Royle, who observes that the uncanny is 'indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or 'coming back,' – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat. At some level the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or 'homesickness,' in other words a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive' [Royle, 2003: 2].

To return once more to Eliot's early essays on Elizabethan drama, the death drive is implicitly linked with motherhood. In 'Cyril Tourneur,' (1930) he writes that 'the cynicism, the loathing and disgust of humanity, expressed consummately in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are immature in the respect that they exceed the object. [...] So the play is a document on humanity chiefly because it is a document on one human being, Torneur; its motive is truly the death motive, for it is the loathing and horror of life itself [Eliot, 1968: 116]. In 'Hamlet and His Problems,' (1920) Eliot had similarly claimed that 'Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. [...] It is just *because* her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing' [Eliot, 1969: 145]. Thus the horror, disgust and loathing necessary to invoke the death motive occurs when such emotions exceed their object, in Tourneur's case, the 'characters which seem to be specters projected from the inner world of nightmare'; in Hamlet's, his mother's perceived infidelity. The suggestion, here, is that when the selfhood of the individual exceeds that of his mother, destruction becomes imperative. In Barnes, however, such an opposition is reversed. In *The Antiphon*, Augusta's overwhelming selfhood – or rather, her constant denial of Miranda's claims to individuation – is the reason both mother and daughter are killed at the close of the play. Augusta is unable, or refuses, to see Miranda as separate except when likening her to the devil [Barnes, 2000: 150]. This reflects Jonathan Dollimore's suggestion that 'as Hamlet famously meditated, to die is a consummation devoutly to be wished. From the earliest times, death has held out the promise of a release not just from desire but from something inseparable from it, namely the pain of being individuated (separate, differentiated, alone) and the form of self-consciousness

that goes with that' [Dollimore, 1998: xx]. Augusta's failure to see herself as an individual, an apparent repression that causes her to regress into an imagined sister to Miranda, wearing her clothes and imagining their shared childhood, thus causes the death of both she and her daughter. This is shared with Amy in Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, who dies as her son leaves, ostensibly on a spiritual pilgrimage and mission abroad. Celia, Nora and Robin, similarly, are consumed by the pain of their separation from another. For Elizabeth Bronfen, 'woman functions as a privileged trope for the uncanniness of unity and loss, of independent identity and self-dissolution, of the pleasure of the body and its decay' [Bronfen, 1992: 55]. The figure of Maisie Mountjoy in *The Elder Statesman* represents just such a woman, acting as Eliot's reincarnation of Marie Lloyd to illuminate the sins of Lord Claverton, and forcing him to absolve himself. After their encounter and his admission of his guilt to his children, Claverton is prepared to face his death. As his daughter Monica observes towards the close of the play,

He's a very different man from the man he used to be.
It's as if he had passed through some door unseen by us
And had turned and was looking back at us
With a glance of farewell.

[Eliot, 2004: 569].

T. McAlindon, in his discussion of Renaissance tragedy, suggests that the archetypal image of the Noble Death, and in particular the calm suicide, is 'a grandiose symbol dictated by the fervency of [the dramatist's] desire to show that great men and women, when put to the test, are capable of throwing away the dearest thing they own as if it were a careless trifle,' [McAlindon, 1986: 21]. The 'active participation in the process of [their] own destruction...even affects the characterisation of the great heroines. Some of them seek desperately to escape the inevitable; all rise in the end above the fickleness

and frailty for which the daughters of Eve are excoriated in seventeenth-century tragic satire, assuming a 'marble constant' and 'masculine virtue' which gives a special lustre to the paradox of the transcendent fall' [McAlindon, 1986: 20]. For Barnes and Eliot, the return to the past is an act of bravery, entangled as it is with the inevitable sacrifice of the self, in the noble death. However, where Barnes' characters are literally killed by their return home, Eliot's seem to divide themselves, leaving a part behind and seeking a new life removed from the family. Harry's return and subsequent escape in *The Family Reunion* kills his mother, Amy, yet is justified by the 'higher purpose' of his departure; and Colby in *The Confidential Clerk* finds his true family only to immediately leave to become a church organist. As Lord Claverton claims, however, 'you can't abandon your family/And your very self – it's a kind of suicide' [Eliot, 2004: 576].

As Burley in *The Antiphon* asks in despair of the Hobbs family's childhood traumas, 'didn't *anybody* get away?' [Barnes, 2000: 121]. It would seem, however, that the only method of escape lies in the use of costume and disguise. One may suggest that M.C. Bradbrook's description of Elizabethan disguise motifs reflects Barnes' and Eliot's semi-biographical works, and their disguised characters and selves therein. She writes that 'a character in disguise need not retain the feelings of his other self. He is like a pathological case of alternating personality... In almost every case the motive is quite inadequate, but the character is enabled to become the marionette man of the play: he controls the intrigue and deputises the author' [Bradbrook, 1969: 67]. *The Antiphon's* Jack Blow, adopted persona of the absent son Jeremy, fulfils this entirely, eclipsing even the Barnes model Miranda in his control over the actions of the play. One of the most fascinating moments in *The Antiphon* occurs as Jack unveils his 'Hobb's Ark, beast-box, doll's house' [Barnes, 2000: 144]. At this point the brothers Dudley and Elisha are

masked, using their sister and mother as puppets to enact a violently ritualized mock-rape, when Jack enters. The stage directions here are perhaps more powerful than the words spoken. Barnes writes, '*Jack pulls the cover off, exposing a doll's house. Dudley and Elisha hurriedly unmask, holding the masks underarm.*' Soon after, Augusta is freed, and '*cross-legged she sits before the toy, picking up the first thing to catch her attention – a stick hung with dolls*' [Barnes, 2000: 145]. In just these actions, it is possible to observe a complex interweaving of dualistic identities, uncanny images, and a grotesque yet deeply personal symbolism. The masks, the dolls, the child-like mother and the murderous sons – the scene resounds tirelessly with a sense of shame and shame denied, striking the 'antiphon' between life and art. Jack, as the play's equivalent to the Renaissance fool, enacts this through his presence and 'the house that Jack built,' thus reflecting Bakhtin's suggestion that the fool 'stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar mid-zone as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors' [Bakhtin, 1984: 8]. This 'borderline between life and art' is, in Barnes and Eliot, inhabited not only by fools, but by doctors, and in particular psychoanalysts. In most of the families they depict, both authors place a detached yet fundamentally flawed individual who claims authority but does not appear to warrant it, and whose actions attempt to control the other characters whilst revealing their own inconsistencies. The subversion of authority in these characters combines a suspicion of medical discourses pertaining to heal the 'human condition' whilst at the same time providing the authors with a figure who can observe the dynamics of the presented relationships from within the text. However, their subversion matters not, when the characters they 'treat' are 'simply in hell. Where there are no doctors - /At least, not in a professional capacity' [Eliot, 2004: 397].

The 'Elizabethan' aspects of the Doctor provided much in accord with Eliot's artistic principles, and while Eliot's introduction was influential in its positioning of O'Connor at the heart of the book, O'Connor's influence on Eliot's characters was similarly great. To return again to Harry in *The Family Reunion*, we find that his rambling speeches in many ways resemble those of O'Connor. He finds himself attempting to deliver truth to people who 'have gone through life in sleep,/Never woken to the nightmare' [Eliot, 2004: 293]. However, he speaks but only Agatha and Mary truly listen; primarily the characters in *The Family Reunion* speak at, rather than to, one another, a syndrome central to Barnes' characters in *Nightwood*. For instance, in the chapter 'Watchman, What of the Night?' the doctor's 'talking-cure' fails, as Nora continues her fixation with Robin. This chapter is echoed in Eliot's play as Harry cryptically insists 'you do not know/The unspoken voice of sorrow in the ancient bedroom/At three o'clock in the morning' [Eliot, 2004: 294]. Indeed, the shadow of *Nightwood* is present in Eliot's setting, 'Wishwood,' and Barnes' novel may be aptly described by the chorus in Scene 1, who ask 'why do we huddle together/In a horrid amity of misfortune?' [Eliot, 2004: 301]. The 'horror' and the innate closeness of the unfortunate and excluded, form the core of Barnes' novel of outsiders.

The doctor is also manifest in a variety of other forms in Eliot's plays. Dr. Warburton in *The Family Reunion*, it is assumed, was present for the births of Harry, Mary and their siblings, as O'Connor was for Nora, and the presence of medical discourse pervades *The Elder Statesman*. However, the most interesting example is Dr. Reilly in *The Cocktail Party*, whose manipulative machinations demonstrate an ambiguous relationship with psychoanalysis shared by both Barnes and Eliot. The 'luxury/Of an intimate disclosure to a stranger' [Eliot, 2004: 361] that lies at the heart of psychoanalysis proves more complex than Edward anticipates, and for Celia Coplestone it proves fatal. In his position

as doctor, Reilly is supposed to offer a cure for his patients through medical knowledge, yet throughout the play there is a slight sense of enjoyment in his words, suggesting a bemused pleasure in watching his plan unfold. In *Nightwood*, as Victoria L. Smith has suggested, O'Connor derives a different type of pleasure from his position as a 'melancholic par excellence' who possesses an 'obsessive need to talk insistently about himself and take pleasure in the consequent exposure of himself' [Smith, 1999: 201]. As physician and pseudo-psychoanalyst, O'Connor's dual nature as both melancholic and doctor distorts and destabilises Freud's psychoanalytic ideal, further compounded by his confused and tormented sexuality and his speciality in gynaecology. Both O'Connor and Reilly step outside of the conventional roles of the doctor, though Reilly appears undoubtedly more sinister as he contrives situations beyond the control of his 'patients.' O'Connor, on the other hand, suffers for his actions, telling Nora of 'my knees knocking together; and my heart as heavy as Adam's off ox, because you are a friend of mine and a good poor thing, God knows, who will never put a stop to anything; you may be knocked down, but you'll crawl on forever, while there's any use to it, so I said "Certainly, damn it!" and brought them together' [Barnes, 1985: 147]. He attempts to excuse his actions whilst paradoxically admitting them to all, as does Reilly, who 'saw the images standing behind her chair,/Of a Celia Coplestone whose face showed the astonishment/Of the first five minutes after a violent death' [Eliot, 2004: 437]. He thus attributes Celia's death to 'fate' in an uncanny knowledge similar to O'Connor's pre-emptive allusion to the novel's final chapter, claiming to have known that 'Nora will leave that girl some day; but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both' [Barnes, 1985: 147]. The knowledge possessed by these doctors, however, is as fraught with disillusionment as that of *The Waste Land's* Tiresias. As Edward implores, 'what is

the use of all your analysis if I am to remain lost in the dark?' [Eliot, 2004: 364]. Eliot suggests, however, that psychoanalysis only serves to 'clear from the mind/The illusion of ever having been in the light.'

O'Connor's claims to medical knowledge are viewed with affectionate suspicion throughout *Nightwood*, satirising the failings of the profession whilst, as Eliot suggests, providing an attempted 'talking cure' for the characters around him, whether they seek it or not. Often, however, his status as physician is used as a mask to conceal his transgressions, in effect performing his role as doctor, while the theatricality of his actions is all too clear. William Kerwin has suggested that this is a common feature in the performance of physicians in early modern English drama, who 'very often define themselves or are defined by others through the language of the stage. Their practices and social roles are shaped by a divided and changing concept of performance, one defined in relation to ideas of knowledge and social hierarchy' [Kerwin, 2005: 131]. Indeed, the anxiety towards the legitimacy of the physician, Kerwin suggests, was a central concern on the Elizabethan stage, for 'as the Elizabethan actor could represent officers of state, bringing churchmen or nobility to life in ways that might challenge their authority, so an Elizabethan citizen could represent a physician and threaten the preserve of his practice' [Kerwin, 2005: 144]. This relates to early 20th century suspicions regarding the legitimacy of the newly emergent psychoanalytic discourse. The ambiguous nature of O'Connor's imposture makes him appear ever-constructed, and self-consciously in performance. Eliot appears, implicitly, to notice the theatricality of the doctor's character, when he writes that 'he ceased to be like the brilliant actor in an otherwise unpersuasively performed play for whose re-entrance one impatiently waits. However in real life such a character might seem to engross conversation, quench

reciprocity, and blanket less voluble people; in the book his role is nothing of the kind' [Barnes, 1985: 3].

O'Connor's dual focus on psychoanalysis and gynaecology, arguably two of the most intimate of medical practices, makes the potential for perversion and error on his part a deeply unsettling one. Neil Rhodes has observed a link between the gynaecological and the grotesque, as it derives from 'the world of the body,' [Rhodes, 1980: 12] and Barnes' horror at the spectacle of childbirth as first displayed in *Ryder* suggests that this link is not unintentional. The presence of the gryphons in *The Antiphon* assumes a further significance in the mother/daughter relationship, as in the early Modern period, the 'gryphon's talons' (or 'griffin's feet') were a forceps-like instrument used to forcibly pull the child from the womb [Calbi, 2005: 63]. Childbirth becomes traumatic even when reversed, though O'Connor sees a symbolic power in its reversal, with his typical subversive humour. He ruminates: 'how more tidy had it been to have been born old and have aged into a child, brought finally to the brink, not of the grave, but of the womb; in our age bred up into infants searching for a womb to crawl into' [Barnes, 1985: 142]. Again the woman becomes the site both of regression and spirituality; the return to youth reflected both as primal return, and blissful ignorance.

Just as Barnes envisions childbirth as paradoxically destructive and sacrificial, Ellen Peck Killoh has suggested that such a formulation applies to the act of the woman writing. She suggests that 'a mother's very power over her child exacts a heavy obligation to support it; similarly if a woman is an inspiration and support to her man, she has a certain obligation not to destroy or undermine her own creation. In such situations all her destructiveness must either be turned in on herself or at least be

deflected into some other channel. When a woman who has been conditioned by these roles sits down at a typewriter, she must switch gears' [Killoh, 1972: 34]. Barnes' own experience of writing would appear to reflect Killoh's assertion, though perhaps not in the political sense that Killoh intended. The very act of writing was for Barnes not a concentrated effort, but an occasional overflow of cathartic emotion. As she writes in a letter to Edwin Muir, 'as I told Eliot, I'm not a 'writer'; once in every twenty years or so, the wound bleeds, that's all' [Taylor, 2010: 2]. Even the process of writing and editing *Nightwood* she described as 'a kind of glee in despair,' [Herring, 1995: 218]. Both she and Eliot, however, are regarded as literary 'greats,' whose careers spanned many decades, yet whose overall artistic output was relatively small. A claim by Eliot, however, that 'the creation of a work of art is...a painful and unpleasant business; it is a sacrifice of the man to the work, it is a kind of death' [Koritz, 1995: 141] suggests that the destruction Killoh envisions in the woman writing was not merely a female complaint. Rather, both authors may arguably be termed poets of 'genius' for whom the pressures of literary tradition were at once inspiring and overbearing.

Eliot's preface to *The Antiphon*, which was never published following Barnes' furious response, claimed that 'it might be said of Miss Barnes, who is incontestably one of the most original writers of our time, that never has so much genius been combined with so little talent' [Herring, 1995: 276]. This statement seems unnecessarily cruel (or 'crewel,' as Barnes put it in her response), yet one may suggest that this overlooks Eliot's earlier discussion of the 'genius' of Blake:

'What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet... The concentration resulting from a framework of

mythology and theology and philosophy is one of the reasons why Dante is a classic, and Blake only a poet of genius.'

[Eliot, 1969: 322]

Genius, for Eliot, existed unconstrained by, and a priori to, frameworks of tradition, heredity and so on, as an untrained and free-form skill which could not be learned. This is opposed to talent, which was the outcome of learning and practice, an erudition and knowledge of convention that Dante possessed, and Blake and Barnes lacked. The similarities between Barnes' *Ryder* sketches, and Blake's woodcuts, has been noted by critics such as Irene Martyniuk [Martyniuk, 1998: 76], and their shared lack of a formal education perhaps makes the comparison fairly apt, if somewhat biting. However, the choice of 'genius' to describe Barnes' subversive prose was not singular to Eliot; Antonia White claimed that 'Djuna has genius if anyone I know has genius,' [Herring, 1995: 202], and Emily Coleman wrote that 'no intelligence is evil, there is some (bad – before we're born) reason why genius like Djuna's should be left stranded without the clear light of the intelligence to give it patches of daylight in the darkness' [Herring, 1995: 205].

Those critical of Eliot's role in the production of *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon* have often referred to the theory of 'impersonality' expressed in his 1919 essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent.' However, Eliot refined this idea throughout his critical works; and it would be impossible to claim that his poetry from *Ash Wednesday* to the *Four Quartets* was anything but an exploration of his personal beliefs. Merely two years after 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' Eliot suggested that 'The Metaphysical Poets' 'incorporated their erudition into their sensibility: their mode of feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought' [Eliot, 1969: 286]. Their ability to 'devour any kind of experience' [Eliot, 1969: 287] he contrasts with the 'dazzling disregard of the

soul' of Milton and Dryden, demonstrating the importance of the 'soul' in Eliot's literary theory. It is thus possible to suggest that Eliot did not seek to drain the emotional complexity from *Nightwood* or *The Antiphon*, but rather that his priorities lay in allowing the 'soul' of Barnes' works to assume their best possible form. Barnes herself wrote in a letter to Emily Coleman that 'I started out grimly sentimental – which is silly. Now I would wish nothing better than to write logically & without emotion. Quite impossible for me, of course. I even find in Shakespeare too great a sweetness. I know of no other writer as mean as I would be!' [Taylor, 2010: 31]. That she recognizes 'impersonality' as 'impossible' demonstrates how theory and practice are necessarily divided; but her relaxed attitude to the Eliotic ideal is perhaps reflective of the way all of what we now view as crucial manifestos of modernism, often taken entirely seriously and at their word, were merely ideas, suggestions for a perceived aesthetic perfection, rather than a set of rules that must be obeyed. Tyrus Miller's claim, therefore, that 'if it were not possible to recover the work's rhythmic unity, its writerly value, its moral cohesion, its disinterested awareness, its "whole pattern," then *Nightwood* would be lost. Lost to modernism, that is, to Eliot's symbolic and moral cosmos' [Miller, 1999: 124] creates a very simple and singular model of modernism which fails to take into account the works of Joyce, Pound, Lewis and Woolf – not to mention the many minor figures of modernism. All of the above named writers would struggle to fit exactly into Miller's definition. As Peter Ackroyd writes in his biography of Eliot, his very nature was paradoxical and his literary beliefs were not always in accord with his actions in life:

'Eliot proclaimed the impersonality of great poetry, and yet his own personality and experience are branded in letters of fire upon his work. He was a poet who insisted upon the nature and value of a tradition, and yet he had no real predecessors or successors. He was a writer who attempted to create order and coherence, and yet his central vision was of 'the void'. His

poetic voice was unmistakable, and yet it was composed from a number of other poets' voices which he adapted or borrowed. He was a strange, private and often bewildered man who was raised into a cultural guru, a representative authority and stability.'

[Ackroyd, 1984: 334]

Indeed, Eliot seemed wary of an author's personal beliefs being imposed upon the reader, and it is for this reason that he is widely considered the 'godfather' of New Criticism. It also seems to suggest, however, a deference on his part to the reader's ability to discern for themselves – a concern that sits uncomfortably with claims of his dictatorial, oppressive and uncompromising stance that he has often been attributed. Of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, for example, he wrote that 'you cannot afford to *ignore* Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs, or to skip the passages which express them most clearly; but that on the other hand you are not called upon to believe them yourself' [Eliot, 1969: 257]. He also seems to recognize the futility of writing to convince, and reading to understand, for in a later essay, 'Religion and Literature,' he suggests that 'the author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, whether he knows it or not; and we are affected by it, as human beings, whether we intend to be or not' [Eliot, 1969: 394]. He continues, 'knowledge of life obtained through fiction is only possible by another stage of self-consciousness. That is to say, it can only be a knowledge of other people's knowledge of life, not of life itself' [Eliot, 1969: 395]. This suggests that Eliot was all too aware of the fact – based upon Freudian notions of knowledge and understanding – that 'unsettling the ground of both poles (imagination/reality), literature entails the experience of a *suspended* relation' [Royle, 2003: 15].

These authors, then, were reticent, even cynical, about the ability of literature to enable a relation between individuals, between historical periods, and between cultures.

Daniela Caselli has suggested that for Barnes, ‘neither adulteration nor travesty are opposed to a past able to work as origin or purity: references and sources are never treated as a way of reshaping tradition (even when this implies fragmentation, as in Eliot’s poetry) but as a form of collusion with a past which, far from nostalgically pure, is tainting and compromising’ [Caselli, 2009: 197]. O’Connor claims of fairy tales that ‘they go far back in our lost distance where what we never had stands waiting; it was inevitable that we should come upon them, for our miscalculated longing has created. They are our answer to what our grandmothers were told love was, and what it never came to be; they, the living lie of our centuries’ [Barnes, 1985: 194]. This certainly supports Caselli’s suggestion of collusion. However, the shared quality of the lost distance implies a common relationality between individuals through the past, shared by Eliot as he writes that ‘every degree of the feeling of humanity, from lowest to highest, has, moreover, an intimate relation to the next above and below, and all fit together according to the logic of sensibility’ [Eliot, 1969: 269]. This shared relation in Barnes and Eliot manifests itself in two ways – it is both indescribable, as Miranda’s ‘unplucked strings’ and Eliot’s ‘stillness of the violin’; and unspeakable, evident in the primitive and grotesque. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin quotes Pinsky’s claim that ‘in the grotesque, life passes through all the degrees, from the lowest, inert and primitive, to the highest, most mobile and spiritualized; this garland of various forms bears witness to their oneness, brings together that which is removed, combines elements which exclude each other, contradicts all current conception. Grotesque in art is related to the paradox in logic’ [Bakhtin, 1984: 33].

Thus as Sweeney repeats in *Agonistes*: ‘birth, and copulation and death,/That’s all, that’s all, that’s all’ [Eliot, 2004: 122] he offers a simplistic portrait of what constitutes the ritual in the human. Similarly, O’Connor claims that ‘the world’s Ritual itself constitutes an instruction,’ [Barnes, 1985: 212], and thus we may understand Eliot’s statement that ‘the failure of the contemporary stage to satisfy the craving for ritual is one of the reasons why it is not a living art’ [Eliot, 1922: 305-6]. Barnes’ work, however, returns to such ideas of ritual, for as Louis Kannenstine writes, *The Antiphon* ‘taps the origin of modern drama in rituals of the medieval Christian church, suggests variations upon the forms of Greek tragedy and early closet drama, and most directly revives the tone and grandeur of Elizabethan drama with a nod at the Jacobean tradition as well’ [Kannenstine, 177: 151]. She therefore both engages with, and moves away from, the rituals and rites of the past. In the invocation of the carnivalesque, the patchwork of life and art is both beautiful and grotesque, stressing the inescapable sensation of being ‘double, split, at odds with ourselves’ [Royle, 2003: 5]. The rituals of the family, the stage, the medical profession, and literary convention, are all deeply intertwined in these works, as Barnes and Eliot came to view themselves as players in the ensemble cast of the literary family drama, and identified with the duality inherent in the figure of the actor. Through the mechanisms of female sacrifice, the inescapability of shallow relationality and divided selves, Barnes and Eliot viewed their position relative to art as necessarily negative, exceeded by their object. However, the bleeding of the wound, the impulse to create, was desirable despite its paradoxical engagement with destruction. By engaging with ritual and tradition, these authors toyed with the polarities of human perception, as they ‘reduce the intrinsic value of the grotesque by declaring that it is a means of contrasting

the sublime. The two complete each other, and their unity, most fully achieved in Shakespeare, produces the truly beautiful' [Bakhtin, 1984: 43].

CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of Eliot's chief skills lay in his ability to elucidate his ideas about art into a clear and cohesive theory; by contrast, Barnes' instinctive approach to literature resulted in a form and style of her own, indebted to her forebears not by reverence or respect, but an eclectic aestheticism, or a frustrating lack of 'philosophy,' as Emily Coleman suggested [Caselli, 2009: 167]. The differences between Barnes' and Eliot's respective oeuvres, however, are representative also of the divergent and shifting corpus of modernism as a whole. To suggest this of modernist theory reflects an observation made by Eliot of Elizabethan drama, a literary form which was influential in many ways for both of these authors. He writes:

'To understand Elizabethan drama it is necessary to study a dozen playwrights at once, to dissect with all care the complex growth, to ponder collaboration to the utmost line. Reading Shakespeare and several of his contemporaries is pleasure enough... But if we wish to consummate and refine this pleasure by understanding it, to distil the last drop of it, to press and press the essence of each author, to apply exact measurement of our own sensations, then we must compare; and we cannot compare without parcelling the threads of authorship and influence.'

[Eliot, 1968: 135]

That Eliot can make such a suggestion of his own literary predecessors makes much Barnes criticism seem reductive by contrast; for if Elizabethan drama could be complex and varied, the insistence upon binaries of genre and gender, upon which many readings lie, is somewhat anachronistic in the omission of the self-conscious multiplicity of modernist thought.

In this thesis, therefore, I hope to have demonstrated the complex relationship between the works of T.S. Eliot and Djuna Barnes, linked as they are by the interweaving threads

of the sacred and profane, and Classical and Elizabethan tragedy. The complex links of these with early twentieth century notions of gender and sexuality, both repressed and transgressed, illuminate a pattern of influence in the works of Barnes and Eliot.

Following Eliot's impulse towards tradition these authors both employed and subverted their literary predecessors, though in very different ways – through Rabelais, Shakespeare, Dante and Blake, Barnes and Eliot positioned their work within the context of literary tradition, yet retained the modernist self-awareness and often irony that characterises their work.

Much criticism of Barnes' and Eliot's works exists in discourses of exclusion not inconsistent with the self-image of modernism as 'rupture' explored by critics such as Michael Levenson in his 1986 work, *The Genealogy of Modernism*. Such images, however, can deny the possibility of understanding between these authors by placing them in stringent, closed categories such as male and female, author and editor, and Christian and atheist. This has the effect of limiting the conclusions that may be drawn by reducing them to only a handful of possibilities following binaries unsuited to Barnes and Eliot, who, fundamentally, were human beings and capable of change and contradiction. This is arguably the beauty of literature, and much criticism of Barnes and Eliot seems to have forgotten this in its impulse towards simplistic categorization. The divisions between 'male' and 'female' modernism as represented by Barnes and Eliot are not nearly as deeply entrenched as early criticism would suggest. I believe, however, that a purely feminist approach is equally unhelpful, in that it still constructs a gender divide which was not remotely black and white in the case of each of these authors.

For while Barnes and Eliot relied upon the polarities of 'sacred and profane' for the aesthetic and spiritual pattern that underlies their works, there is much to be said for the differentiation between the critical boundaries previously suggested, and the polarities for which I am arguing. This difference lies wholly in semantics; in the implication that binaries offer two opposing options, while polarities suggest an entire spectrum that may be traversed in between. While they rely upon the structures of tragedy, myth and psychoanalysis for their theoretical subtexts, Barnes and Eliot remain ever alert to the limits of these categories of thought, with their hazy boundaries and subjective interpretations, as the closest approximation to the expression in language of the depths of human consciousness. They know that something lies beneath the surface, whether spiritual or primitive; but in the absence of knowledge, literature has to do. That this belief, however, does not constitute the whole of Barnes and Eliot's aesthetic, makes their works ever more fascinating. Their relation to each other, to the 'beloved,' to the genealogy both of blood and of literature, demonstrates the diversity and complexity of the modernist era which, I believe, allowed writers to weave a tapestry of influence and concurrence, style and theme at once shared and severed, and as such the writings of Djuna Barnes and T.S. Eliot demonstrate just one instance of the complex machinations of modernist literature.

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